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15

Lazy Dungeon Master





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Keima and Rokuko's Daughter

SOTO

"SO GOOOD! SOCKS ARE THE BEST! THEY TASTE
JUST LIKE WHAT I ATE INSIDE PAPA!"

THE BIRTH OF THEIR
FIRST CHILD?!

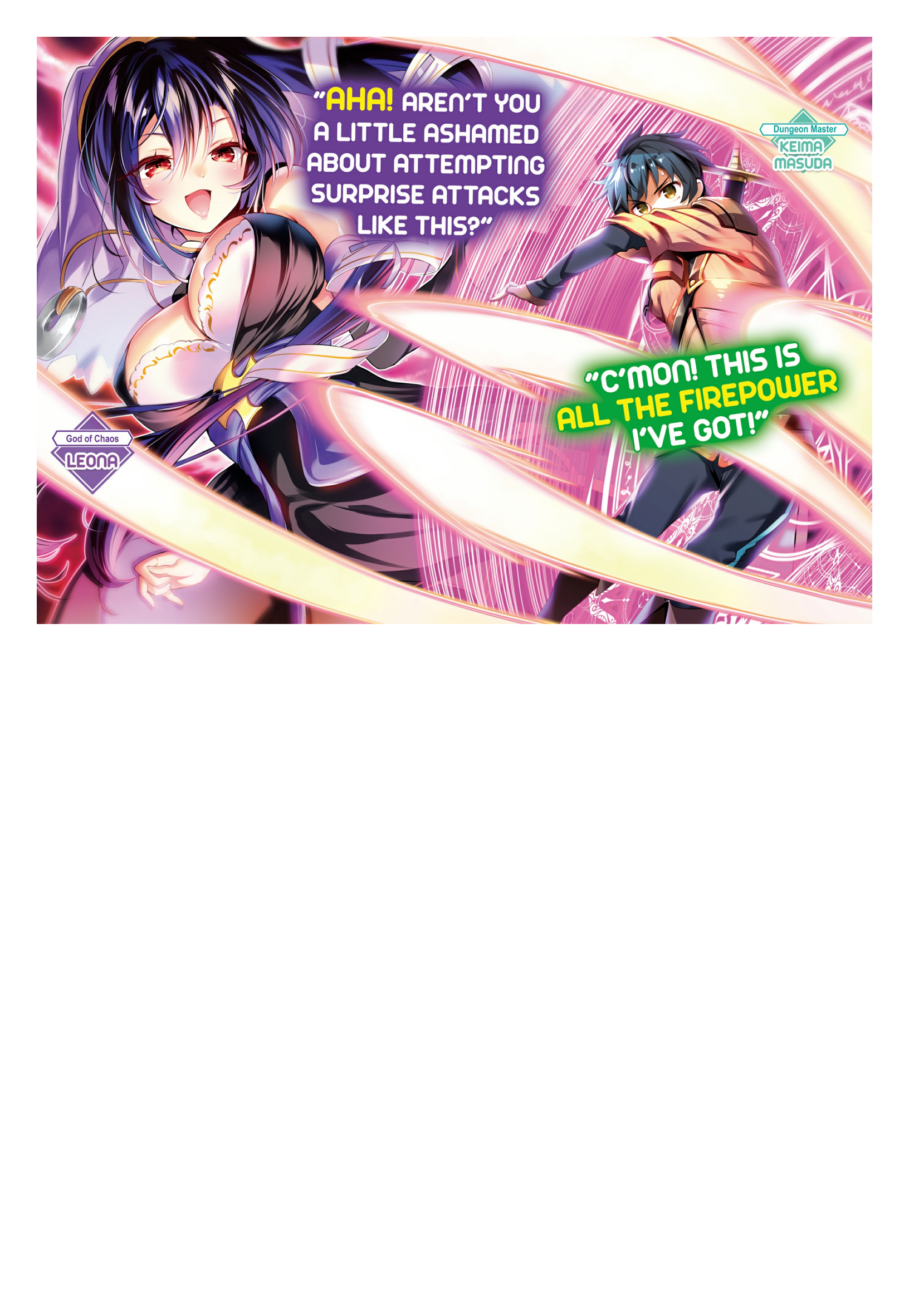


"HI, I'M ROKUKO TSIA."

Dungeon Core 695

ROKUKO

ROKUKO'S FIRST
SCHOOL EXPERIENCE ♡



**"AHA! AREN'T YOU
A LITTLE ASHAMED
ABOUT ATTEMPTING
SURPRISE ATTACKS
LIKE THIS?"**

Dungeon Master
**KEIMA
MASUDA**

**"C'MON! THIS IS
ALL THE FIREPOWER
I'VE GOT!"**

God of Chaos
LEONA

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Prologue

This is a tale from before Keima and the others went to the Demon Realm.

Keima and Haku realized that Rokuko lacked any form of sexual education. That was largely because Haku had engineered it to be so, but the situation had changed drastically since then, and Rokuko's relationship with Keima had developed so much it was inevitable that things were about to go to *the next level*.

It was a grave situation. However, at this point, it would actually be *more* dangerous for Rokuko to not have a proper education. Thus, Haku took responsibility for giving Rokuko sex ed.

"Errrm... Rokuko," she began.

"Yes!"

"I believe that it is important for you to, ah... learn about how babies are made."

"Yes!!!"

Rokuko's powerful response sent Haku faltering fearfully. Her sweetheart was looking up at her with innocent eyes, and she was going to have to stain her with knowledge of the sticks and holes, of the meaty way in which children were made.

Haku paused. Perhaps there was some way she could solve this.

"First, let us talk about sexual reproduction."

"Um, I think I remember that. It's the lowest thing anyone can do to a woman, right? They only do it if they want to hurt her and make her feel worthless."

"Y-Yes. Indeed. I did teach you that."

In order to trick Rokuko, Haku had recovered scenes of humans violently raping each other in the capital, her dungeon, to emphasize her point. Incidentally, humans were fundamentally inferior creatures from Haku's

perspective, so said videos were not erotic to her at all. It was like recording footage of wild cats breeding.

Haku froze.

“Haku? Sister?”

“I-I will teach you how children are made.”

“Right!”

What to do, then? It would be simple to just say that sexual reproduction was in fact the way to make children, but that ran the risk of Rokuko immediately rushing over and engaging in the act with Keima. Even to Haku, it was clear just how fond she was of him. Well, that was precisely why it was dangerous not to give her a proper education, but... Wait. On second thought, Keima seemed to have a general understanding of all this already.

Okay. Haku made a decision on how to proceed.

“Keima knows the specifics of the deed himself, so I will tell you only the first steps.”

“The first steps?”

“Indeed. Dungeon Cores are built differently from not just humans, but all living creatures, so preparations are necessary for making children.”

Indeed. Her plan was to just not give details in the first place. It would be even better if Rokuko refused Keima if he ever tried to engage in sexual reproduction! This was the power of pushing work onto other people! It was a dirty strategy, as expected of Dungeon Core Number 89!

“Um, what preparations?” Rokuko asked.

“First, you need a body that matches your partner’s. Our Father is a god, after all. As his children, we Dungeon Cores have divine bodies ourselves. Some would call us demigods.”

Dungeon Cores never grew old and never needed food or rest. They wouldn’t die unless killed by external means, which made them more like gods than living beings.

“In short, if Keima earns a divine body like ours in some way, then you will be able to have children.”

“Ah...! I see! S-So that’s why Keima’s been gathering the Divine Bedding. Jeez...”

“Indeed, by collecting and using the Divine Bedding, one could become a demigod.”

Rokuko blushed crimson. She recalled that Core 112’s wife, Redra the Red Dragon, had been considered the goddess of protection for Tsia Mountain. It all made sense.

Haku recalled something, too—that gods grew in number in a different way than living beings did.

“Oh yes, this is something Keima likely doesn’t know, so I suppose I will tell you what happens next.”

“R-R-Right!” Rokuko squeaked, her voice cracking nervously. This was exactly what she had wanted to know.

“If you both cut off a portion of your power and mix it together, you will make a child.”

“Cut off...?”

“That is how Father made us, no? Of course, he is an incredible god and could make a child himself without needing to mix his power with anyone else’s.”

“I see...”

“However,” Haku said, a solemn expression coming over her face, “cutting off a portion of one’s power is a serious thing... It is safe to say it is literally risking one’s life. It’s possible to die in the process. Unless one has as much power as Father, it is not so easy to make children.”

“O-Oh...” Rokuko lowered her eyes sadly.

Incidentally, that was completely true when it came to making children as gods. If done poorly it was more dangerous than the births humans went through, so this was something even Haku had to explain in full with complete seriousness.

“More than two gods can also make a child together. There was a trio of goddesses that birthed one son, for instance. This diminishes the burden on each god, and makes it a bit easier.”

“Hmmm... Oh, s-so you, me, and Keima could all... maybe... have a baby together?”

Haku’s smile froze with an almost audible snap.

“That idea did not occur to me, but it wouldn’t be impossible, no...”

“Well... I guess that opens up a lot of options?” Rokuko said.

“M-More importantly! There is a more practical method here, Rokuko!” Haku said, quickly moving on. “As I said, Father is quite an incredible god. Thus, if you ask for his help, you will be able to safely give birth.”

“Wait, so... Um, wouldn’t that be having a child with Father?!”

“No, you would only be taking his power. He gives us clumps of power equal to that which we use for making children ourselves, so we can recover the power we expend. Naturally, that power comes at a price, but it makes for relatively safe births.”

“Oooh! I didn’t think of that!” The scales fell from Rokuko’s eyes. Indeed, she could just get Father to help!

“Well, either way, you will still be cutting off some of your power, so you’ll need to wait some time before making a second one. It takes a bit before your power replenishes and adjusts to your body again. I would say it takes about a year or two?”

“I see...” Rokuko nodded, which earned a satisfied nod back from Haku.

“And that’s how we Dungeon Cores make children. Did you catch all that?”

“Yes! Thank you, sister!”

* * *

And so, we arrive at the present day. The seasons passed, and spring arrived again.

The Dungeon Core assembly that year ended peacefully, and as Rokuko

walked through Goren, the town atop her dungeon, she came across the couple who had been married at the Beddhist church some time ago.

“Oh, Hubb and Waife. How are things?”

“Aaah, Mrs. Goren! It’s been too long. Both me and my wife are just fine, thanks to you,” Hubb replied with a grin. Waife looked a bit sick, though, which gave Rokuko pause.

“Are you okay, Waife? Hubb isn’t abusing you, is he? You two are the first couple married at the Beddhist Church, so I’d like for your marriage to be a happy one... Also, look at that stomach! Did you get fat since the last time I saw you...?”

“Erm... Well, I suppose that’s one way of looking at it,” Waife replied, while awkwardly yet still happily stroking her belly. It was, indeed, quite swollen. Rokuko questioned why her stomach was only swelling in one specific area, which seemed abnormal, but the couple soon answered her question with big smiles.

“Thanks to you, we’re finally expecting.”

“Expecting?”

“Yep! My kid’s inside this belly!”

Ah, that explained why they looked so happy. They had a child. Wait... A child?!

“Um, why is there a child inside her stomach? Did she eat it?! Why?!”

“Er... What are you talking about, Mrs. Goren? We’re a couple, so obviously we ha— ow!”

“Ahem. Putting aside that whole eating business... Mrs. Goren, do you not know how babies are made?” Waife asked after flicking Hubb on the side of the head.

“I obviously know that. My sister told me just recently. A husband and wife need to borrow power from Father and fuse their energy together, right?”

“What the heck are you talking about?”

“Um...?” Rokuko faltered. “I-It’s the kissing part then, right? Is it the kissing?”

This time, she tried what she had heard from Redra. She was absolutely confident the power-fusing ritual Haku had spoken of was kissing, so she answered concretely despite the embarrassment. Though she forgot that Redra had said afterwards that that wouldn’t be enough to make children.

Hearing that, Hubb and Waife began whispering between themselves.

“Uh, Waife. I’m starting to think the town chief’s wife might be, y’know, something of a sheltered rich girl...?”

“Mhm... That’s what it feels like. No doubt she ran off with the town chief before she got a proper education. She’s the type to think fairy tales are real.”

Hubb and Waife settled on Rokuko being an ignorant girl born with a silver spoon in her mouth.

“So, what’re we gonna do? Actually, this means the town chief’s not doing anything with his wife at all. And she’s so pretty, too... All those rumors about him being a lolicon must be true after all.”

“We’ve realized something we shouldn’t have... At this point, our only option is to take responsibility and tell her the truth.”

Thus concluded the secret chat.

“Mrs. Goren, we’ll tell you how children are really made... Do you know what pregnancy is?”

“Nuh-uh.”

Unbelievably, they had to start all the way from zero. Waife let out a sigh.

Chapter 1

It was spring, and within the Dancing Doll Inn's dining hall were two girls blooming in conversation.

"Whew, udon sure is tasty, huh, Mai!"

"It certainly is, Michiru."

One of the girls was Michiru, a Succubus working as an apprentice nun at the Beddhist church. The other was Maiodore Tsia, Niku's betrothed. Udon had been added to the dining hall's menu after Keima's return from the Demon Realm. It was his souvenir for the townsfolk, and at some point it had become a staple on the menu. The noodles used wheat different from what could be farmed in Tsia, but who knew where he was getting it from. Perhaps he had found a source to import from during his stay. He surely had connections. A student from Tsia had come to stay over a year ago, after all.

Incidentally, Maiodore had privately received another souvenir from Niku. It was just a tapestry without much practical use, but she had happily clasped it to her chest all the same.

"Gosh, I wish I got a souvenir from the Demon Realm, too," Michiru said.

"Ahaha. We are engaged, after all. Did the town chief not give a souvenir to the church? Surely the Divine Pajamas are quite an incredible souvenir from a religious perspective."

"That's not what I mean. I'm talking more, like... as friends!"

"Aaah. I see."

Incidentally, Rokuko had diligently prepared souvenirs for all of the town's higher-ups, like Gozou. She had Demon Realm wine and stuff. Suilla accepted the wine, but naturally none of it trickled down to the underage Michiru.

"I asked 'im about it. Apparently they, like, fought someone super strong in the Demon Realm? It's kinda hard to think of anyone stronger than the princess

who came over, though.”

“Lady Aidy, you mean? I never thought that I would associate with a foreign noble before my own debutante ball. Though it is still up in the air whether she will remember my name and face at all.”

“I don’t really like her, y’know. She always blabbers about dueling the second she opens her mouth. To our High Priestess, even! Who knows what’s going on in her head. Would’ve been better if she’d been all about marriage instead of dueling. ’Cause marriage is our job at the church. The princess said dueling is a church’s job, too, but not Beddhist churches, that’s for sure.”

“M-Marriage, you say? Ahahaha, one day Lady Kuro... ahem, Kuro and I will get married, too, I hope.”

“And if that happens, I’ll hold the ceremony for you! Heck, I’ll even follow you to bed, too!” Michiru grinned, and Maiodore returned the smile with an uncomfortable one of her own. After all, a married couple’s bed was a holy place, and going there meant assisting with the baby-making process. Only the most coddled and ignorant of noble girls would need that, and as Maiodore had received a proper education, that did not include her.

Visitors arrived as they talked. Naturally, this dining hall was mainly for adventurers. It only made sense that there would be visitors, but...

“Hm, this hall is more well kept than I expected. Albeit small nonetheless.”

“Prince. Are you perhaps comparing it to the academy’s dining hall? Do recall that this town is smaller than the academy in the first place.”

“True, true.”

The visitors were clearly men of high status. There were three of them, and they were all handsome like a trio of adventurers from a storybook. And, well, one of them was being called a prince, so...

“You there. Where do I deliver the meal ticket?”

“Yes, sir, right over here! Ah, C-Rank meals, I see!” Hanna, the completely green Silky maid, accepted the meal tickets and guided them to their seats. Things weren’t very busy at the moment, so she even set the table for them.

“Hmm. Mai, that was pretty weird, right?” Michiru asked.

“I believe that is the prince of Daide. His arrival certainly is unusual, but why do you ask? Do you know him?”

As a noble, Maiodore knew the appearance of Daide’s prince as a matter of course. He may have been from another country, but portraits of royalty were freely available no matter where you went. (As for portraits of the imperial princess, Maiodore was personally familiar with three entirely different-looking ones, perhaps to stave off assassins.)

Michiru shook her head. “No, no, that’s not what I meant. I mean, wasn’t it weird that they knew about meal tickets and stuff?”

“Why would it be?”

“I mean, most people who come here for the first time end up super confused.”

“Oh, I see.”

In most commoner restaurants they didn’t bother to go through all the effort of distributing meal tickets, and in higher-class restaurants they wouldn’t want to disturb valuable customers with the tedious process. Thus, throughout all of the empire, only the Dancing Doll Inn actually used the meal ticket system. It was that rare.

“Perhaps they were taught at the counter?” Maiodore suggested.

“At the very least, he was familiar with meal tickets. He acted like someone who was coming here for the first time but knew all about meal tickets!”

“Michiru, you’re oddly observant, aren’t you?”

“Heh heh! Behold, the observational skills of Michiru the grand detective!”

“Detective?”

“Apparently that’s the name for adventurers who focus on solving mysteries. Usually murder mysteries! You should read Herlock Sholmes, it’s super good! You can borrow it at the church!”

“Ah, genre fiction, then.”

As of late, the Beddhist High Priestess had been using her spare time to translate foreign texts and donate them to the church. Herlock Sholmes was probably one of those.

Putting that aside, the prince of Daide and his entourage swiftly received their C-Rank meals and began eating. Maiodore watched, and... indeed, they did not seem to be particularly surprised. That was odd.

The C-Rank meal was a stew filled with beef. But usually, it was downright bizarre for a backwater country town to give out beef so freely. It would be somewhat understandable if the dungeon produced Minotaurs and they served Minotaur meat, but the closest dungeon where Minotaurs appeared was the [Flame Caverns]. Only first-rate adventurers like Keima could casually hunt in a place like that.

“Sigh... I wonder how Summer is doing. I wish I’d brought her,” the prince said.

“She is certainly doing fine. I’ve seen her skills with my own eyes.”

“Yep, me too. She’ll knock the crap outta most dudes that come at her.”

“I trust you two, but still... Ah, Summer, how I miss you.”

The three of them chatted about nothing while taking no note whatsoever of all the beef on the table. Maiodore considered the possibility that the prince was just ignorant of how the world worked, despite coming all this way to a foreign country’s town.

“Perhaps we should tell Keima?” Maiodore asked.

“Bleeeh, I’m lazy. Should the receptionist be handling that?”

“The current receptionist is Neruneh, no? I find it hard to imagine she would make reports like that.”

Neruneh gave the strong impression of someone just going with the flow and living in her own world. No doubt she cared absolutely nothing about the nobility, and subsequently, no doubt she knew nothing about a foreign prince. Neruneh treated even Wataru the Hero as a normal person, which honestly made one question whether she could even distinguish what people looked

like. She probably didn't remember someone's face until she met them many times over. Really, Maiodore wasn't confident Neruneh knew her or Michiru's faces.

"Can't we just tell Niku or something...?"

"I suppose so. In which case, I will inform Lady Kuro of the situation. Ahaha, I wonder if she'll praise me..."

"Sure would be nice if she did!"

And so Maiodore left.

* * *

I have no idea what's going on, but apparently Daide's prince is here.

Dolce gave me a report on it (since she had casually swapped places with Misha after Aidy left), and then Maiodore came and gave a similar report. I thanked her for sending word, then blinked in confusion at a foreign prince being here.

"A prince, huh...? I wonder why he's not staying in the grand suite, then."

I decided to observe the so-called prince's entourage from the Master Room.

First was Harkes, the Prince of Daide. Then there were his two retainers, Crusch and Kenho. And finally, there was his shadow bodyguard (whom Dolce said she ignored because they weren't an assassin, though they were pretty good—she would've beaten them easily anyway). Said shadow bodyguard was hiding their identity from the prince's group, but upon being spoken to by Dolce they paled, revealed their identity, and separated from the prince temporarily to have the discussion. Dolce apparently had high praise for their quick and correct decision making.

Anyway, the four of them went pretty much straight to the dungeon.

I checked their DP per day to see how strong they were. The prince was 202, while the retainers were each around 250. The shadow, however, was 532. Which put them... around the level of an average Hero. The others were still competent, though. They easily blew past the Goblins and traps, then hunted the labyrinth Golems with ease. Prince Harkes and Kenho used swords, while

Crusch launched stone stakes with magic for support. The shadow... was just staying on guard, observing their surroundings. They had no openings.

And upon defeating Iron Golems, they put their corpses into {Storage}... Interesting, they all had {Storage}. Pretty rough foes for a dungeon to face.

“Not bad. They’re pretty good.”

“Uh-huh. They’re saying they just want to check the dungeon out today, but what do you think they’re really here for?” Rokuko asked, having appeared beside me at some point. Her face was really close to mine. I felt like the, what, physical distance between us had shrunk dramatically since Aidy left. Her cheek was close to rubbing against mine.

“So, Keima. What are we going to do?”

“In what context?”

“I mean, won’t they just conquer the dungeon pretty easily at this rate? They seem pretty top tier.”

“Aah... Well, yeah, we can show them up to the place with the Dummy Core. Just like we did with Wataru.”

“That’s true.”

This was a good opportunity to go through the dungeon’s current layout.

First was the town of Goren. We earned loads of DP from the people there while getting extra from visitors sleeping in the inn. There was also the tunnel through Tsia Mountain that connected us to Pavella. But putting that aside...

Floor 1 was the entrance area and was a light jab with Goblins and traps.

Floors 2 and 3 were the labyrinth area. Iron Golems spawned in them, and the Magic Blade testing rooms were there as well.

Floor 4 was the former puzzle area with the Inn of Greed, which made it essentially a rest spot.

“Most adventurers who come to our dungeon stop here,” Rokuko said.

“Yeah, since hunting Iron Golems provides some steady income.”

From there the difficulty rose, and the areas became targeted at advanced

adventurers.

Floor 5 was the spiral stairway. The walls would push out to knock someone down the center, and at times the floors would collapse to make one fall down to the lower floor.

Floor 6 was the storeroom area. There were rooms for Golem Blades, experimental Golems, *etc.* The first Haniwa Golem was wandering it as well, making it a simple but genuinely dangerous area.

“Some people actually do come here, though not super often.”

“Yeah, they always load up on Golem Blades before taking them out... Which was the idea, but still.”

Then came Floor 7, which had three branches.

Floor 7-1 was the grassy plains area. It was a peaceful rest spot that existed primarily for Rokuko’s pets to relax in the sun.

“This is a safe area, but basically no adventurers actually bother to go this far...” I said.

“Maybe we should make it a concert hall like Mikan’s, and host live shows for Succuma... Wow, I’m a genius! You in, Keima?”

“No.”

Floor 7-2 was Phenny’s Playground, a magma area. It led into the [Flame Caverns]. Igni sometimes dropped by to play with Elulu the Elf Ghost.

“This is where Phenny is growing up mostly by himself. There’s a few adventurers who pass through here to get to the [Flame Caverns],” Rokuko said.

“Wataru went through here first, if I remember correctly.”

“For better or worse, no adventurers have crossed paths with Igni yet.”

Floor 7-3 was the new puzzle area. It was the canonical path to the end. Aidy destroyed it, but I did my job and fixed it. Sigh.

“These puzzles are set to take super long,” Rokuko said.

“Yep. At the very least, it’ll take over a full day. It should buy plenty of time... though I feel like it’ll never work when it counts.”

Subsequently, Floor 7-3 led into the coliseum area, and then the Boss Room. I had reverted everything back to normal after messing it up for Aidy. Oh, and just for the record, in the coliseum there was an Iron Haniwa Golem to fight, and in the Boss Room was the Dragon Golem.

“It’s crazy how jamming traps into it lets the Dragon Golem breathe fire,” Rokuko said.

“It only works in the Boss Room, but that doesn’t matter much since bosses can’t leave the Boss Room anyway.”

“Too bad it doesn’t come even close to being as strong as a real Dragon.”

“...You know most Dragons will look weak if you compare them to the [Flame Cavern] family, right?”

That said, it would be fair to say the Dragon Golem was seeing exactly zero use. Not that I wanted people to reach and fight it.

Anyway, clearing Floor 7-3’s Boss Room finally got you to the Core room. However, the room contained only a Dummy Core. There was a secret room hidden within it: it was a trap that exploited one’s prejudice for thinking the Core room was always the final room. And the best part of the Dummy Core room was that it was a Boss Room as well, that boss being an Orichalcum Golem the size of a thumb. Rokuko’s idea.

On top of everything, said thumb-sized Orichalcum Golem was hidden behind a ceiling tile, making it extremely hard to find. And even if one did find it, managing to kill it would be even harder. Not to mention that killing it just opened the secret door—finding the door would be yet another journey.

“A mini Orichalcum Golem... A pretty evil idea, if I do say so myself!”

“A boss so tiny it’s impossible to find, and almost impossible to realize you’re even in a boss room...”

“We’re using the Boss Spawner that Father gave us to produce Orichalcum, right? How much did that end up producing, anyway?”

“One per month, if left completely alone. We have two of them, so we get two per month, but still, not much.”

I ended up shaving down the Orichalcum sword a bit further to make a third thumb-sized Orichalcum Golem. It would stand guard while the Boss Spawners were dedicated to recycling the other two. They had gone through several cycles already, and it felt incredible to see my stock of Orichalcum steadily go up.

Anyway, let's presume someone actually did manage to kill the Orichalcum Golem and find the hidden door. They would find another room with a Core in it, which would surely be the real Dungeon Core... except actually, it was yet another Dummy Core. The real trap would be the satisfaction one felt after seeing through the secret passageway and defeating such a devilish boss.

And that sums up the entirety of the [Cave of Greed]... Wait, you want to know where the actual Dungeon Core is? The hidden room had yet another hidden passageway within it, and that led to the Final Area. It was filled with insanely lethal traps, with the Dungeon Core resting safely behind it all. Incidentally, only dungeon employees were allowed in, since it had stuff like the Suzuki Wall that we really wanted kept safe.

It was safe to say the Final Area was like an entirely different dungeon cut off from the [Cave of Greed]. One of the routes forward was at the bottom of a pitfall, for example, so invaders not in the know would almost certainly get stuck.

And yeah, there was one final trick. There was a hidden room above the ceiling of the tunnel through Tsia Mountain, which had a Dummy Core in it. The tunnel was filled with similar hidden rooms, so there were plenty of decoys to distract people. So basically, even if invaders got into the Final Area, we could flee through the Castling function while buying time. We had built this last resort over the past year in secret, so only Rokuko and I knew about it.

Incidentally, in terms of dungeon territory, Dragg on the other side of the mountain was actually included. It was developing pretty nicely, thanks to its town chief Cid Pavella, and the growing population meant more DP streaming in for us. Very nice.

Thus concluded the entirety of our dungeon by Tsia Mountain. The Dungeon Core (Rokuko's true body) was protected behind multiple layers of tricks and

traps. Even a somewhat skilled party of adventurers posed no threat to Rokuko's safety whatsoever.

With the overview finished, Rokuko gave me a lovey-dovey smile. "Eheheh. Keima, I love you."

"Y-Yeah? Where's that coming from?"

"I mean, how hard it is to conquer our dungeon is proof of your love, right? There's not a Core out there that wouldn't be happy to be this thoroughly protected."

Is that how it works...? I guess it makes sense.

"With this, I can feel safe even with a bunch of super strong people like Daide's prince attacking me."

"True. We can pretty much ignore them."

...Or on second thought, maybe I should formally welcome him or something? Nah, if he's here in secret I don't want to go spilling his beans. He didn't say anything to us, so we're just going to treat him like a normal adventurer. Though things could get problematic if he dies here.

Rokuko and I lazily watched... er, observed... no, actually, there was no point dressing it up. We lazily watched the Daide group work their way through the dungeon. There was a chance we would have to step in, but what we were doing could hardly be called proper observation.

"Keima, want something to eat?"

"Sure. I could use some popcorn. Also, throw in some juice."

We put the prince and his group on a large monitor and leaned back on giant cushions, like we were watching a movie. After all, our dungeon was iron tight, and even a decent party stood no chance of conquering it.

I ripped my way through the popcorn and washed it down with orange juice. *Yep. Now that the dungeon's safe and secure, watching adventurers go through it is just pure entertainment. You know, maybe it would be fun to make a dungeon where everything was recorded and shown to people on the outside. Not that I'll bother making one like that myself.*

“That popcorn stuff. Is there a melon roll-flavored version of it?” Rokuko asked.

“If there is, I’ve never seen it before.”

“Gimme some of yours, then.”

“Sure.”

I watched the dungeon attack show while sharing popcorn with Rokuko. Life was peaceful.

* * *

The prince and his retinue were making solid progress through the dungeon. They once again began at the entrance and worked their way through the labyrinth. Goblins and Clay Golems posed no threat whatsoever to them. They blasted through the same areas they had yesterday. The prince withdrew a Magic Blade in the test room while talking about how surprised he was that it would be so easy to acquire one, only for the shadow to inform him it could not be brought out of the room. He slid it back into the stone bitterly.

This shadow guy’s a nice all-rounder, just like you’d expect from someone on the level of an average Hero. The other three, including the prince, are kind of just doing whatever they want. They’re not even gathering intel ahead of time like the shadow did.

The prince and his retinue alone likely would have been destroyed by the test room, but the shadow was there to help out when it counted. Though really, those three were acting so casually it was like they were visiting an amusement park for fun. I had to question whether their adventurer rank was actually high enough to enter the dungeon.

“And y’know, the mage in that group sure seems like a musclehead. Seems kind of weird for a magic user,” I said.

“Hm? Does magic have anything to do with intelligence?” Rokuko asked.

“Uh... I guess not.”

In this world, there wasn’t much of a connection between intelligence and using magic. Casting spells and the like didn’t actually require much thinking.

Magic was basically a tool, like a bow and arrow. Even when compared to warriors, it was just a difference between hitting people with muscles and hitting people with mana. Magic was, ultimately, just one more convenient tool in one's arsenal. One benefit was that you could use it anytime, anywhere as long as you had mana. Though one could say that knowing when to use all of one's trump cards would require intelligence.

As we chatted, the prince's retinue broke through the labyrinth area. They ignored the Inn of Greed and headed straight to the spiral staircase.

"There's Magic Blades past this point! Let's bust out all the stops for Summer!"

"Prince, there is little information about the dungeon past this point. Please do not take the lead."

"Right, good point. I shall let Kenho be the vanguard, then."

"You can count on me! I'll show you the power of the next knight commander!"

"This is quite a sizable set of stairs... Falling down too many would hurt. Be careful, Kenho," said Crusch the mage.

"I shall tie us together with rope, honorable Kenho," said the shadow. They had contained the prince when he was about to burst into the spiral staircase unprepared, then tied themselves to Kenho as a lifeline. Yeah, without this shadow, they would've been finished here. And in fact, without the lifeline, Kenho the muscle chad would have been pushed off the stairs or fallen down a floor and died multiple times. About five or six times, to be precise.

"So the walls push out, and the stairs collapse... On our next trip I will mark them as we go, for reference purposes," said the shadow.

"Right. You're so wise," the prince said.

"Pro adventurers sure are something else," Crusch said.

According to what they had told Dolce, the shadow was an assassin that served the Daide throne, but had contacted the prince's retinue under the guise of being an adventurer to babysit... or, rather, protect them.

They cleared the spiral staircase in this way, and moved on to the storage area. It seemed their goal was to acquire Magic Blades; the best thing to do here was to let them get them and leave. Didn't want them hurt in a way that left permanent aftereffects, after all. Though perhaps that would have been preferable if they had been staying in the grand suite.

Incidentally, while Misha stayed in the grand suite, Dolce was staying in the church. There was the guest room made for Aidy when she was here, but apparently the basement was chillier and more filled with the grudges of the malicious dead, which made for a more calming sleeping area for her. Yeah, I know. It was a church. With grudges of the malicious dead. Thanks to the jail in the basement for imprisoning thieves. Well, Dolce was eating the built-up grudges like they were snacks, so really it was a win-win for us.

When Dolce leaves, maybe I should have our elf ghost Elulu check out the place, too.

"So, what's the plan, Keima?" Rokuko asked.

"I'll fiddle with it so they don't encounter the Haniwa Golem, and let them find the Magic Blades."

I lazily sent Golems their way while guiding them in the general direction of the Magic Blades. And so, the prince's retinue accomplished the astounding feat of acquiring Magic Blades (Golem Blades) on only their second day of attacking the dungeon!

"Prince, these are the Magic Blades," the shadow said.

"Oooh! We did it, Harkes! Let me have one!"

"Sure. There are more, so I grant that sword to you, Kenho. You did take vanguard when we were climbing down the stairs. Any complaints, Crusch? Djungaria?"

"None from me. I'm a ranged fighter," Crusch said.

"I need only the payment we agreed on," the shadow said, taking one of the Magic Blades off the wall and handing it to the prince. The prince then granted the blade to Kenho, who was apparently going to be the next knight commander of their country. Judging by their conversation, their goal was to

get multiple Magic Blades, not just one. They would go hunt more if they didn't have enough, probably.

"Keima, how many Magic Blades are you going to give these guys?"

"Uhhh... I'm guessing about five at most. One for each, then one as a bonus."

Although the so-called Magic Blades were made from my {Create Golem} and didn't cost us a single copper, flooding the market with them would still lower their market price. It was something I had to carefully think about and manage.

That said, it was fair to give a skilled party like this at least five of them. After all, their party DP per day rivaled Wataru's.

Oh, but how high is Wataru's DP nowadays? Now that I think about it, I haven't actually seen it lately.

"Oooh! This is the third one!"

"You get one, too, Crusch! Here, have it!"

"Hah. I suppose I will take it."

In the end, the prince's retinue left after getting the five Magic Blades I'd planned out for them.

Alriiight, hopefully they just leave Goren entirely now. I doubt they can beat our boss, but I feel like killing a prince will cause more problems than it solves.

The prince's retinue apparently took the next day off for rest. The three oddly sparkling chads hung around the inn, then entered the onsen. The shadow was absent, instead going to the Adventurer's Guild to deliver the Iron Golem corpses.

Okay, time to gather some info on these troublemakers.

I opened the dungeon monitor while sitting on my bed and listened to what the prince's retinue were talking about. What? I was illegally recording them in the bath? Sorry, you need evidence to sue, and they would never get any, since this was a dungeon. Also, the three chads were apparently used to bathing onsen style—so much so they naturally wrapped towels around their waists without bothering with the bathing clothes. The fact they looked straight out of

a painting regardless was due to them having perfect facial and physical aesthetics. Lanky, muscular dudes were popular with the ladies, as far as I could tell.

“Whew. Pretty easy dungeon for us three,” the prince said with a laugh as he sank waist deep into the water. Yesterday’s adventure had instilled him with confidence.

“Prince, Kenho almost died four times.”

“Yeah? Well, I suppose that’s inevitable for a vanguard.”

“Yup, Crusch, Harkes. But that’s why we hired an adventurer, yeah? Thanks to them, I’m as alive as ever. In other words, it was nothing!”

“That is some slim logic. Though I suppose that kind of thinking is one of your strengths, Kenho.”

“Still, that adventurer... Djungaria, was it? I can’t tell if that skill level is normal for adventurers, or if they’re just especially skilled... Unfortunate that they refused my offer to hire them for good.”

And so the prince’s retinue chatted about a bunch of stuff that didn’t matter. I wanted them to talk about their objective or whether they’d be leaving already, but their lips seemed to be sealed.

“Oh, Keima. Doing some eavesdropping?”

“Do you have to put it like that? But yes.”

Rokuko entered my room like always. She was holding a volume of manga.

“Oh, don’t look, Rokuko. The video’s showing the boys’ bath.”

“Um, hello? This whole place is my dungeon. Naked humans mean nothing to me.”

“True, but...”

“Also, I want to help, Keima.”

“Alright, if I ever need to peep into the girls’ bath, I’ll come straight to you.”
Not that the girls’ bath was relevant to this.

“Plus, this is kind of dumb. Why not go to the bath and just ask them directly?”

Just say, like, ‘How long are you guys gonna be here?’”

“Ehhh... I guess that would be faster?”

“Yes. It would. Bye bye. I’ll be reading manga on your bed.”

Apparently Rokuko’s determined to read manga in my room while I’m gone. C’mon, read in your own room. Not that I have anything to hide in here. I don’t have a single porn mag to my name.

Anyway, the prince’s retinue seemed like they were set for a long bath. Following Rokuko’s advice and slipping in to ask them seemed like a decent idea. I would probably want to use {Ultra Transformation} to hide my status as the town chief, though. That way, if they got suspicious, I could deny all involvement.

“What, you’re going with a disguise, Keima?”

“I mean, yeah. And {Ultra Transformation} is some good security to have, too.”

“Aaah... Well, okay. Bye bye. I’ll be reading manga here.”

“Uh, yeah, you just said that. Bye?”

Rokuko abruptly lost all motivation and started lazing around for some reason, so I left and changed into bath clothes before heading to the onsen while transformed. When I arrived, the retinue was splashing about and still talking about nothing.

“I’m telling you, Harkes, swordplay’s all about the muscle,” Kenho said.

“Nah, it’s all skill. Don’t you agree, Crusch?”

“Brains are important to figure out techniques, no? You should use your head more, Kenho.”

I had no idea what they were talking about, but I didn’t care at all, either. I went ahead and used {Purification} on myself, then went to—

“Hey! You! Don’t get in the bath with clothes on!” shouted the prince suddenly, pointing at me.

“Oh? Why not?” I asked, calmly radiating an aura of “Who do you think you

are?” while replying like a normal towns person.

The prince gave me a condescending look and sniffed, his brows furrowed. “What, you’ve never bathed before? You’re supposed to bathe in the nude. Strip.”

“What about those things around your waist?”

“Towels are a necessary evil, as otherwise our crotches would be exposed. Still, with {Purification} they don’t spoil the hot water,” he replied, crossing his arms and exuding confidence.

Alright. There were a lot of things to point out here. First, apparently the prince’s retinue knew about Japanese-style bathing rules. Towels themselves were commonplace even in the imperial capital (since there were magic tools that wove them), so it wasn’t strange they knew about them. However, towels being a necessary evil for bathing...? It was possible that Daide had just coincidentally developed a similar culture, but... if this was the influence of a certain someone (Leona), it would certainly be problematic.

Secondly, they apparently didn’t know about bath clothing. Hence the demand for me to strip. There might’ve been more cultural differences at work there, but he seemed pretty narrow-minded. *Is that how a prince should be acting? You’re gonna be dealing with foreign diplomacy later, my man.*

“Got it? Now strip. It’s common sense to bathe naked.”

“Actually, these are called bathing clothes, and they’re just like the cloth wrapped around your waist.”

“Say what? You’re gonna wash your body with those clothes?”

“No, they’re for covering it.”

“I’m telling you, it’s common sense to bathe naked. To think you don’t even know that... Look, there’s towels, use those instead. Alright? You with me?” The prince sighed with exasperation. What an annoying guy.

That may be how it is in Daide, but Daide’s not the whole world. Everyone in the empire just uses {Purification} to clean themselves, and towels are used for wiping one’s body down. Dunno how it is in Daide, though.

“Hey, you. You’re speaking to Daide’s prince, y’know? Showing a little obedience would be for your own sake, if you know what I’m saying,” Kenho said.

“Indeed. The prince has made his will known. Now strip,” Crusch added.

C’mon, lackeys. Don’t use his authority to make me strip. You wanna see my naked body that much? (i.e. the naked body of the dude I transformed into.)

“Well, well, what’s all this then? I don’t know about any princes, but forcing your country’s culture on a foreigner doesn’t seem good to me. This is the empire, remember? We have our own customs here,” I said. For example, nudity wasn’t really much of a thing in public. It didn’t bother me, but I was roleplaying a normal person here.

“Hrm, you have a point...” the prince said.

“I see, I didn’t think of that,” Crusch said.

“Huh, so that’s how you guys live here? Cool.”

Whoa, what? They sure backed off a lot faster than I thought they would.

“So, does that mean we’re actually the ones being rude here? Be honest,” the prince said. Now they were asking whether they were the troublemakers. *Holy crap, talk about straightforward.*

“Nah, you can wear whatever you want. It’s just, I don’t know about nobles, but most commoners aren’t used to getting naked in public. These bathing clothes are for them.”

“I see. So we’re fine, then? We’re not ashamed of our bodies, so yeah.” The retinue made a bunch of poses. It annoyed me how he was basically correct.

“Yup. As long as you used {Purification} on them, it’s no problem at all.”

“Mm. Good to know. You have my thanks,” the prince said, shooting me a sparkling smile and then directing his palm my way as if saluting me. There was a pause, then he blinked. “Hey. Do commoners express their thanks in a different way? Or is this another foreign culture thing?”

“Aaah, that’s what that meant? Is this a bit, like, royalty doesn’t bow their heads?” I went ahead and bowed my own head, to return his thanks.

“Huh, we never even thought about that!” Kenho exclaimed.

“Kenho and I do lower our heads, prince. I believe this man speaks the truth.”

“Oho! You’ve got good observation skills, then. And the courage to talk back to royalty. I like it. How about you come work for me?”

Welp, looks like I’ve earned the prince’s favor for some reason. Not that I’m going to actually work for him or anything.

Although a bit off about how the prince’s retinue were speaking and acting, I succeeded in engaging them in conversation. They must have really liked me, as the prince invited me to join them tomorrow like this: “Alright, we’re going to the dungeon tomorrow, and you’re coming with! We’ll split the Magic Blades with you!”

I mean, I did turn them down since there was nothing in it for me, but they just took that as humility and said they liked me even more. What the heck was up with this prince? Was his brain made of pig iron or something?

“Er, well, just out of curiosity, what are you even doing here, Prince Harkes?” I asked, deciding to just throw caution to the wind and ask directly.

“Right. This is top secret, but...” he began. I listened quietly, not pointing out that something top secret should not be shared with a self-proclaimed adventurer you’ve never met before. “The truth is, I want prestige.”

“Prestige?”

“Right. There’s a girl I love back in my home country. But she doesn’t have much status, understand? I’m out questing for prestige, so I can earn permission for us to get married.”

If you get too much prestige, won’t that just widen the gap between you, and make the marriage harder?

“If I can prove myself, they’ll at least let me be with the woman I love. Our country is one of freedom. We can’t let ourselves get swallowed up by the empire like Tsia was,” the prince said, burning with resolve.

Ah, I see where he’s coming from, then. I feel like he’s being a bit optimistic here, but well, they’ll probably let her be a concubine or something no matter

how low her status is. I've heard plenty of cases like that.

"Summer's a great girl. There was a time when I thought only of becoming king and cared nothing for my subjects, but she woke me up with a slap!"

"Wouldn't that be, like... sedition?"

"She gave me advice without fear of being executed! She's worthy of trust!"

Love is blind, I suppose. Must be a case of it being hard to make the right decision when it involves someone you love.

"Harkes, let me brag, too. One time I had a real rough falling out with my old man, and she was there to hold my hand!"

"Heh. It certainly did take courage for her to hold the hand of such a muscly delinquent. She's a perfect fit to be a queen. Oh, and I had an incident with her as well, when she displayed startling intelligence..."

"Wait, wait! Summer's my girl. Let me brag more! First, the day I met her..."

I was forced to listen all about the girl in question.

At this rate, we're all going to get overheated. I need to change the subject.

"Still, do you think you'll find enough prestige here to make a difference?"

"Yes. Conquering a dungeon would be the fastest route to prestige, no? We will expose the deepest secrets of this dungeon and secure iron imports or something. After all, my country has no mines and relies on imports for almost all its iron. That leaves plenty of room for prestige to be earned, no?"

"This dungeon's already been conquered, though."

"It has...?" the prince asked.

"You didn't know, Harkes? Even I knew that!"

"Y-You knew that, too, Kenho? Huh..."

Whoa, hold on, don't tell me you didn't even know an adventurer had reported to the Guild that they had conquered it up to the Dungeon Core... You gotta do better research. This is just bad planning; are you sure you're fit to be a king? Apparently this muscleheaded future knight commander heard it from the shadow. Man, shadows seem pretty useful. Maybe I should raise one of those

myself.

.....

Actually, wait, on second thought, basically everyone in my group is already like that. Rokuko's surprisingly tough, Niku is basically a Venus flytrap that hides her immense power beneath an innocent loli form, Rei pretends to be a High Priestess but is actually a dungeon manager that doesn't hold back when it comes to torture... And well, there's Kinue, Neruneh, the Succubi, and the dungeon monsters, too. Everybody's got a hidden side to them. I—

Wait. No. No... It can't be. Is... Is Ichika the most normal out of all of us? Ichika, the girl who got enslaved over gambling and food costs...? Alright, I might need to get some more normal humans on our side. Maybe I should go buy slaves again.

"Well, I suppose there's still the Iron Golems. Right. How about we send those we hunt back home? A genius idea, don't you think, Crusch? Go ahead, tell me your opinion as my future prime minister."

"It is critically flawed. Given the distance from here to Daide, the shipping costs will be nothing to scoff at. There are taxes as well, so it is questionable if we will be able to send one Golem's worth for every two Golems hunted."

"And that will never earn us supremacy," the prince mused. If they had to pay the empire an equivalent amount of iron as they were sending home, they would basically be strengthening the empire rather than themselves (albeit only marginally).

"I believe it would be unwise to try to mine from deposits in other countries. We can disguise the issue on an individual level with our {Storage}, but on a larger scale..."

Man oh man. This may be a bit much for a town chief like me to say, but Daide sure is a small country... It's surrounded by the empire, the Demon Realm, and then the Holy Kingdom on the other side of a mountain range, so most everyone just treats it kind of like a buffer zone. The royalty has a rough time of it, I hear. So, well... My sympathies?

"You sure don't have it easy, Prince Harkes."

“You understand me?! Alright, you’re one of us now! You’ll have the warmest of welcomes!”

“Sorry, but I’m not interested in serving the throne. Look elsewhere.” *Why does the prince like me so much?*

“Er, well, securing talent’s an important job for me. I’m saying this only because I trust you, but our country’s kind of in a state of chaos right now... I want any skilled man I can get.”

“State of chaos, you say? Ah, I do recall the Suzuki the Hero incident...”

“That is part of it, but I can say no more. Apologies.” The prince fell silent.

What could be worse than a Hero killing the previous king? Well, I guess he could just mention that part since everyone already knows about it?

From there, I retreated from the bath before I overheated or told the prince’s retinue my name. I got what I had come for, learning that they were here to earn prestige and secure talent, and I didn’t have any other business with them. It was a plus that I learned they were approaching this with no plan, and were just winging it, more or less.

And so, I settled on ignoring them. I undid {Ultra Transformation} to lose the prince’s retinue entirely, then returned to my room and resumed sleeping like nothing had happened. Zzz.

In the end, the prince’s retinue gave up on conquering the dungeon since it wouldn’t give them prestige and instead spent three days hunting Iron Golems to fill their {Storage} to the brim before leaving town. They apparently wanted to get all the way to the end, but they couldn’t get past the new puzzle area known as Floor 7-3! I got the feeling that was the first time the puzzle area had ever proven useful. Hell yeah.

* * *

The thought suddenly occurred to me that I should organize my {Storage}.

For some time, my {Storage} had been overflowing with all sorts of insanely dangerous stuff. The black bomb that exploded on a keyword, the purple

Dungeon Core, the pure Dungeon Core from Father, the Orichalcum Blade... and on top of that, precious treasure I could never speak of to anyone. There were also several spell scrolls I hadn't gotten around to reading yet.

"Wait... What?"

Or so I thought, anyway.

I turned my {Storage} completely inside out, but nothing fell out. The only thing inside was the Dungeon Core I got from Father. It fell out, but nothing else did.

"The hell...?"

Luckily, the Divine Bedding was safe—I was wearing the Divine Pajamas as a jersey, and the Divine Alarm Clock was on my arm as a wristwatch, so neither had vanished. Rokuko had the Divine Blanket and Divine Quilt, so those were safe as well. But where had everything else gone? Neither the cooking I had Kinue make nor the Golem Blades I was storing were there. I stuck my hand into {Storage} and felt around, but felt nothing. Usually I would instinctively be able to sense where things were through magic.

I peered inside. It looked like an empty void from the outside, but maybe I could see if I stuck my head inside...? Nah, that ran the risk of time freezing for my head, which would get promptly decapitated. Testing that alone would be too risky. I needed a helper.

"And so that's why you called me," Rokuko said.

"Yeah. When it comes to stuff like this, you're the one I can rely on the most, so yeah. I'm gonna stick my head inside {Storage} while moving my hands, and if they stop moving, pull me out immediately." After all, Dungeon Cores could keep functioning within {Storage} without stopping.

"Eheh, it doesn't feel bad to be relied on. Okay. Go ahead."

And so, with Rokuko there as insurance, I stuck my head inside my {Storage} to look around.

Ehhh... I still can't see anything. There's no light or sound.

But suddenly, light filled my vision. Rokuko had apparently pulled me out. I

jumped in surprise, since I felt the odd sensation of my shoulder being tapped about ten times, but all ten taps happened at the same time.

“Whoa! Wait, what? It hasn’t even been five seconds.”

“Keima, are you okay? You completely froze. It’s been fifteen seconds.”

“Wait, really?”

I hadn’t noticed my consciousness pausing, but apparently I had remained conscious while being unable to realize I had stopped at all. Good thing I had paid for Rokuko Insurance.

Also, I hadn’t responded even after she tapped my shoulder a bunch. What I felt was probably all her taps building up and hitting me at once, then? I felt everything I should have felt while time was stopped? That was certainly a bizarre sensation.

“{Storage} is surprisingly dangerous, huh?” Rokuko said.

“Yup. Seems pretty possible for someone to accidentally put themselves into {Storage} and end up frozen forever.”

“I feel like their mana would run out... Oh, but maybe the exit would vanish, and they’d be stuck inside forever.”

Holy shit, that’s scary. But anyway... Where’d everything but that Dungeon Core go, then? Surely a hole didn’t open up in {Storage} that they all fell through or something... Though I mean, I guess I can’t discount the possibility, since I don’t understand how it works in the first place.

“Hey, Keima. This is the Core you got from Father, right? I see you still have it,” Rokuko said, stroking the unnumbered Dungeon Core.

“Hm? Yeah. I can use Dummy Cores to level up {Ultra Transformation}, so yeah.”

“Hmm... Maybe all your stuff went inside it, then?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, I have my Master Room, don’t I? It wouldn’t be weird for this Core to have one, too.” Rokuko slapped the Core a bit. Her theory made sense.

“I see. It’s a real Core, not a Dummy Core.”

“If so, the extra space will be pretty convenient. Though we have to figure out how to see inside of it for starters,” Rokuko said, placing her hand on the Core then grunting with focus. Apparently she was trying to get inside of it. I had to question whether Cores could enter other Cores, but then again, we had entered Mikan’s Dungeon Core before. Or he let us enter it, I guess?

“I think we might be able to get inside if we force the door open. Keima, you do it, too.”

“S-Sure?”

I put my hands on the opposite side of the Core from Rokuko. I recalled how it usually felt to enter Rokuko’s Master Room, and lightly poured my mana into the Core to open it... though maybe it would be better to flood it in to force it open.

I poured my mana into the Dungeon Core, and its glowing began to clearly intensify. Did that mean... it was working?

“Mm, I feel like we need just a bit more to get inside.”

“We want to at least get the Orichalcum Blade back from it.”

Rokuko and I pushed more into it, which led to it getting engulfed by a fluffy golden light.

Uhhh. It’s giving off a kind of divine aura now, but... I feel like we’re making a critical mistake here. Because I mean, this doesn’t happen when you’re going into a Core’s Master Room, does it?

“Hey, Rokuko.”

“Mm?”

“What exactly are we doing here?”

“Well, obviously we’re... Um... What *are* we doing?” Rokuko tilted her head.

C’mon. The light’s getting even brighter.

“Y’know, I think we should stop this now.”

“What a coincidence. I thought the same just now, and tried to stop, but I

can't seem to no matter how hard I try."

"That can't be... Wait, I can't take my hands off?!"

My hands were stuck flat against the Core, like they were being sucked by a vacuum cleaner. Even if I tried to stop pouring mana out, it came out on its own. Although not a ton.

"Rokuko, are you okay?"

"Oh, uh-huh. I can't take my hands off, but I feel fine. By the way, this is kind of sudden, but I really want to get in the onsen right now. Can we go?"

"Uh... No."

"Aw. Darn it."

Why would you ask that when our hands are tied, anyway? Were you planning to go to the boys' bath or the girls' bath? We don't have a mixed bath at our family onsen... Ah, crap, I gotta use the bathroom.

"Still, what should we do here? We're kinda stuck..." Rokuko said.

"Hmm... Maybe we can use the dungeon functions to get away?"

"Your {Ultra Transformation} might work, too. Aah, but, ummm... I think we should stay like this a bit longer. I mean, we're kinda stuck, sooo." Rokuko, with her hands still on the Core, leaned forward to bring her face close to mine.

Er, what.

"...Keima. Let's kiss."

"Er, but..."

It happened just as Rokuko whispered while blushing. The Dungeon Core shot out an intensely bright light.

"Gah, my eyes!"

"Eeep?!"

I moved my hands to try to cover my eyes, and the Core flew upwards. Apparently my hands had disconnected from it midway through lifting them up.

The Core arced through the air, scraped the ceiling, then plopped right back

into my still-open {Storage} portal. Nice shot. Anyway, an enormous beam of light shot out of {Storage}, forming a pillar against the ceiling, and then... calmed after a few seconds.

“Well, it doesn’t look like the ceiling’s scratched. The hell was that all about?”

“Who knows...? Is everything in your {Storage} okay?”

“We’re here because everything but the Core vanished, but... Let’s see.” I stuck my hand into {Storage}.

I felt something hard, but soft. Hmm? I touched it a bit more, and just as I thought it was silky smooth yet also bumpy, something warm and wet rubbed against my hand.

“Guh?! Wh-What the?!”

“Keima?”

“There’s something inside the {Storage}! It licked my hand...?!”

When I pulled my hand out, it was wet. A sniff confirmed the scent of saliva. While cleaning my hand with {Purification}, I concluded whatever was inside was a living being with a mouth.

“But time stops for living beings in {Storage}, doesn’t it? Let me try.”

Rokuko stuck her hand into my {Storage}, then immediately balked with surprise.

“Bwuhwuhwuh?! S-Something’s inside!”

“See? See?! I told you!”

“What the heck what the heck?! Oh, it’s kinda silky. Hair?” Rokuko timidly felt around inside the {Storage}.

“Ngh?! I-It grabbed me! K-Keima, help!”

“I-I’ll pull you out!”

I tugged on Rokuko. And as she came out... so too did a black-haired girl, who was firmly gripping Rokuko’s wrist.

“...Uh, who are you?” I asked.

“Keima, who’s this? Do you know them?”

“Nope.”

The girl’s eyes were shut, but she opened them wide. She had blue eyes that felt familiar somehow. Or rather, on the whole, she looked a lot like Rokuko... Oh. Oh no. The girl opened her mouth and spoke with an energetic tone the fated words:

“Papa! Mama! Hi, I’m your daughter!”



Rokuko and I froze. The smiling girl paused, then tilted her head.

“...Papa! Mama! Hi, I’m your daughter!!!”

“We heard you the first time,” I said. *Deep breaths. Calm down... Okay. I think I’ve got it.*

“You’re the Dungeon Core from a second ago, right?!”

“You think so?” Rokuko asked. “Right, Dungeon Cores can move inside {Storage}... But wait, by papa and mama, you mean us?! A-A daughter... Now that you mention it, she does look like Keima!”

“No way, she has your eyes, Rokuko.” *Wait, why are we talking like a couple gushing about a newborn baby?*

“So, just to theorycraft here... You and I poured our power into that Core, right? And then... some part of us got absorbed and a new Dungeon Core was born... I guess?”

“Ah. Right. I get it... In other words, this is our child!”

“I’m a dad now...?”

“You two are fast on the uptake; that’s my papa and mama for you! That’s basically it!” The girl clapped her hands and approved of our theory with a smile.

I can’t believe I slipped up like that. What, does this mean we really have had our first child? I mean, who’s ever heard of a first child that popped out big and able to speak? Maybe Dungeon Cores are different.

“Anyway, I’m gonna go ahead and ask Father about this.”

“Oh, then I’ll tell Haku ab—”

“ABSOLUTELY not, Rokuko! Save that for when we know what’s going on! Are you trying to kill me?” I exclaimed, only for a message from Father to arrive first. “Subject: Congratulations, Keima! It’s your first child!”

“Seriously...?”

A god used an email to confirm it was our daughter. *Okay, let me check the actual mail...*

Heya. First off, let me say congratulations. Seems like you and Rokuko completed the unnumbered Dungeon Core! It was a blank preset Core I made just for you to level up your Hero skill, but the two of you booted it up with your power. That makes you two the Core's parents, no doubt about it. Take good care of her!

Well. That confirmed my theories.

P.S. I won't give the Core a number, so be sure to name her! Also, I went ahead and connected the Core to the network so she can use the DP Catalog. Consider it my baby shower gift.

Seriously...? Well. Baby shower. Okay.

"What did Father say?" Rokuko asked.

"She's our daughter, no mistaking it. And he wants us to name her."

"Yay! What name should we go with!"

"Oh, oh! I want a cute name!"

"Gosh, I've never named a daughter before! I'm so nervous!"

Rokuko apparently had no issue with the Core speaking normally despite just being born, nor her raising her hands to speak as if she had already been raised somewhere with that culture. Maybe this was just how Dungeon Cores were, and the preset contained this sort of knowledge. Man, Dungeon Core births were pretty different from human births.

"Come on, Keima, think with me. She's your daughter, too."

"R-Right. I guess so, but... Uhhh... You. Where'd the Dungeon Core itself go?"

"Hm? It's still in there," the girl said, pointing at the still-open {Storage} portal.

Don't tell me my {Storage} got turned into a dungeon? I'm gonna have to double-check this.

"So basically... your dungeon is...?"

"Your storage, mama!"

"Aaah, figures. That makes sense... Wait. What did you just say?"

“Like I said, mama’s {Storage} is my...”

What?! Mama?!

“W-Wait, why am I mama?!”

“Hm...? I thought about what I knew and determined you were my mama, mama! What, am I wrong?”

“I’m a guy, so I’m papa!”

“Oh, I see...? Boys are papas...? I didn’t know that.”

Hello, God of Darkness? I think your preset is kind of messed up.

“Gods are papas, and not-gods are mamas! That’s how it works to me!”

“Oh, that makes sense! That’s how it is with Father,” Rokuko said.

“I see you got the same education, Rokuko...”

Dungeon Cores were the children of gods. In other words, they were gods themselves. It followed, then, that I was mama...? *Gah, why must divinity have such gender freedom?*

“I’m a human and Rokuko’s a human-type Dungeon Core, so how about you treat us like you would humans?”

“Question, mama! When it comes to humans and gods, don’t you think gods should be given higher priority?”

“Please no... Just go with human rules here. Right, Rokuko? You don’t want to be called papa, do you?”

“Hm? I don’t really care either way. Eheheh, it’s our daughter!”

Oh no, she’s not on my side. I have to fix this, fast.

“Keima. What’s important is that she’s our child. Isn’t deciding who’s the papa and who’s the mama trivial in the face of that?”

“I admire the mindset, but this makes it sound like I’m the one who gave birth to her.”

“Didn’t you...?” Rokuko pointed to my {Storage}.

Ah... Huh. So I’m a mama... The phrasing reminds me of Tsia’s slums. I’d really

rather not be called that since those memories are traumatic, but...

“Okay, how about this. The phrase ‘Keima mama’ is repetitious and hard to understand, so call me papa instead.”

“Okay! Papa!”

“I don’t really care either way, but if that’s how it is in your language, it’s fine with me,” Rokuko said.

Seriously?! I mean, I’m glad you both caved in, but still. Wow.

“Anyway, time for the name. She’s an unnumbered Core, so let’s call her Soto temporarily.”

“Sototemporarily? What does that mean?” the girl asked.

I blinked, dumbfounded by her including ‘temporarily’ in the name, but before I could correct her, Rokuko clapped her hands with a big smile.

“Sototemporarily! I like that name. Soto means external, exceptional, and unnumbered in Japanese. This kind of vocabulary is cake to me now.”

“No, I said her name can temporarily be Soto. Got it? Temporarily.”

“Right, like momentarily, for now, and so on. Easy!” Rokuko exclaimed.
“Sototemporarily, or Soto for short! It’s so cute... I love it!”

Why do Cores like weird things so much?! Is this just like her finding a foreign language cool because it’s foreign? She’s literally hugging herself and twisting with glee here... Wait, is she trying to act like that isn’t a temporary name?

“We’ll think of an actual name later! Your name is not going to be Sototemporarily.”

“Too bad. It’s decided! I’m Sototemporarily! Call me Soto for short!”

“Please, let me think of an actual name. Please.”

“Give me socks, then. I’ll think about it if you give me freshly removed socks... Oh, you aren’t wearing socks right now, papa! There aren’t any in {Storage}, either. Too bad, the deal is off!”

What is she even saying? I mean, she’s right that I’m not wearing socks, since I’m in my room, but...

“And so, my name is Sototemporarily, *i.e.* Soto! It’s settled!”

“Congratulations, Soto. Oh, and Keima gave me my name, too. It means 695 in his language,” Rokuko said, puffing out her chest with pride.

I’m sorry. It’s all my fault... In so many ways...

“Woow! Papa’s a natural at giving names!”

The worst part is, that’s not even an insult. She actually thinks that. Can I just... go to sleep, to escape reality? No? Okay, then I’ll just pop off to the bathroom real fast. I’ve been holding it in for a while now.

* * *

When I got back from the bathroom, Rokuko and Soto were (naturally) still in my room. Soto was getting hugged and cuddled to death by Rokuko. They looked more like siblings than mother and daughter... Oh, her name? Yeah, I gave up, she was Soto now. Not much I could do when she was dead set on keeping it...

“Oh. I need to check with Ichika that Soto’s not a weird name.”

“Don’t worry about that. I asked her while you were in the bathroom,” Rokuko said. Apparently Ichika had coincidentally dropped by while I was away. The name wasn’t weird at all. *Whew. No repeat of the Niku disaster here.*

Then, I noticed the still-open portal to my {Storage}. *Why isn’t it closing...? Is it because it’s Soto’s dungeon now?*

“Want me to close it, papa?”

“Er, yeah.”

Soto waved a hand, closing the {Storage}. It was my {Storage}, but it didn’t feel like mine anymore. I got the feeling it would be dangerous not to investigate this.

“Just to be safe, I’ll give you back the right to open and close it, papa!”

“Oh, you can do that? Well, makes sense, it is my {Storage}, so... Wait. Speaking of which... Soto. Where’d all the stuff in my {Storage} go?”

“Eheh!” Soto smiled while audibly faking a laugh.

“...Where’d it go?”

“Teehee!”

Don’t teehee me!

“Thanks for the meal!”

“Well, there was food in there, sure...”

“It was all super yummy!”

“The Orichalcum sword? The bomb?”

“Doubly so! They were really energizing... Eheheh.”

“I see, you ate them. I see...”

What kind of terrible meal is that?! I mean, I get that Dungeon Cores can eat anything, but still. Guess I should just be glad she didn’t eat any of the Divine Bedding... It’ll take time to get the orichalcum back, but we have a steady source of it, so it’s not a fatal blow or anything. No point crying over spilled milk.

And then, it happened. The door was flung open.

“Master, congratulations on your birth,” Niku said, with an excited expression... or rather, she was stoic as always, but her tail was wagging rapidly. She looked at Soto, who was still being hugged by Rokuko, and approached her before kneeling. “Your name is Soto, I am told. I am Niku Kuroinu, Master’s head slave. It is nice to meet you.”

“Aaah, so cute! Gimme your socks!”

“Hm? Okay.” Once she understood what Soto was saying, Niku took off the knee socks of her maid outfit without hesitation. She rested the freshly removed socks in her hands and offered them up to Soto, her brown legs laid bare. “Here.”

“Eheheh, thaaanks. Nom!” Soto gripped the tip of the knee socks, opened her mouth wide, and ate them. She just... took a big bite.

“What the?! Spit it out! Spit it out!” I cried.

“So goood! Socks are the best! They taste just like what I ate inside papa!”

Soto ignored my cries and kept chewing down Niku's knee socks. It may have looked like she was eating a baguette, but they were definitely socks. She was chewing on them as if they were normal food, like radishes or bread or something.

What the heck kind of teeth does she have? And did she eat the socks in my {Storage} the same way? So much so the flavor became near and dear to her?

"Okay, you're definitely Keima's daughter. Be sure to chew before you swallow, okay?" Rokuko said while handing a fresh pair of socks to Niku.

"I am glad to see that Master's seed is strong," Niku said. Soto finished the right sock and got to work on the left one, this time starting from the thigh part.

Excuse me?! I've never eaten socks before! I physically couldn't if I wanted to!

"Do you know the tastiest way to eat strawberries? You start with the leaf. That way you leave the sweet tip for last and end on the best note possible. Socks are the same way. The toes are the tastiest part. Nom nom nom."

"Uh, no. Socks aren't food," I said.

"Don't worry, papa. I'm a Dungeon Core, so I won't get tummy aches from eating socks."

"That's not the problem... Or wait, maybe it is?"

Adults stopped children from eating weird things because they ran the risk of getting sick or poisoned. Given that Dungeon Cores would be just fine eating socks, there was no need for me to stop Soto.

"Ngh, but... But..."

"Gulp! Aww, that wasn't enough to convince you? Mmm... Maybe I should tell mama about the *collection* that was inside your {Storage}?" Soto whispered, quietly enough for only me to hear. *W-Wait, she knows about my... M-My sock collection?! The collection of freshly removed socks I gathered from Niku and Ichika forgetting them, or Rokuko tossing them aside? Well, given that everything in my {Storage} is gone, we can conclude Soto ate the whole collection. Which means she knows everything. Curse you, Soto! You're blackmailing me when you're only one day old?! Dungeon Cores are terrifying!*

“Collection? What’s that, Keima?” Rokuko asked.

“N-Nothing. Nothing at all!” I awkwardly blew Rokuko off, then dragged Soto to the corner of the room and started whispering.

“C-Come on. It’s not right to talk about people’s collections like that.”

“Hmmmm?”

“You can’t just steal people’s treasure and secrets from their {Storage}... That’s war!”

“...So this blackmail works against you, papa?” Soto grinned. *Crap, I dug my own grave.*

“B-But you don’t have any evidence of the collection anymore, so...”

“Don’t woorry, I can recreate anything I eat! Take a look!” With a snap, Soto was suddenly wearing the knee socks she had just eaten. Judging by the placement of the stains, there was no mistaking they were the same pair of socks.

“Did you just pretend to eat them while stashing them somewhere?”

“Tch tch tch. Behold, for this is the Hero power I have inherited from you... {Teensy Reproduction}!” Soto declared, giving a smug grin that reminded me of Rokuko.

Hero power? Teensy, not ultra? Let me check my {Ultra Transformation} just to be safe... Ah, it’s level four now. It got drained? Probably something like that. I’ll go break a Dummy Core to boost the level back. This would’ve been pretty bad if I weren’t a Dungeon Master.

“I can recreate anything I’ve eaten once every hour. The copy disappears after one hour.”

“That’s pretty convenient... But why is it limited to things you’ve eaten?”

“No clue! If you don’t know something, papa, how could I know?”

True. Maybe it was meant for Heroes to reproduce food and potions they had before. The ‘teensy’ bit was suspicious, but whatever. Incidentally, given that she produced both of Niku’s socks, she could probably produce multiple things

at once, unlike my {Ultra Transformation}.

“The one thing I can say is... I can eat your collection as much as I want, papa! I win!”

In conclusion, she could produce the Orichalcum Blade and Gravity Bomb whenever she wanted as well. It would be hard to use them as materials since they would disappear an hour later, but in return you could use and drop them instantly.

“So, want me to show mama your collection? Eheheh.”

Come on, I told you that wasn't fair! What can I do but give in?! Gah!

“...Alright. I'll keep quiet about you eating socks. But no more using my collection as a shield.”

“Yaaay! It's a deal!” Soto threw up both her hands with joy. *Sheesh. I can't tell if I'm scared of what she'll become, or if I'm scared of how much trouble she's already going to be. Either way, she's unmistakably our daughter.*

...Unmistakably, huh? Yeah, I'm already thinking of her as my daughter. Strange. We only just met today, too. Is my soul recognizing Soto as my daughter? It's possible. After all, Dungeon Cores are equivalent to gods.

Anyway, having no other choice, I permitted Soto to eat socks. Dungeon Cores had different physiologies in the first place. I had her eat a steel sword as an experiment, and she showed me the blade between her teeth like a toothpick... Eating socks didn't seem so bad after that. Incidentally, she finished off the rest of the sword like a theater troupe—goer.

“I feel like I saw a child eat a sword like that in a manga before... Never thought I'd see a gag like that happen in real life.”

“I ate orichalcum, you know?” Soto grinned, showing her straight, shiny teeth. By the way, that manga character couldn't eat rubber, but Soto had no such limitations. She could even eat konjak.

“That's amazing, Soto. Here, have seconds,” Niku said.

“Yaaay! Thanks!” Soto happily accepted the iron ingots and ate them like jellied toast, while munching on bronze coins like potato chips. Jesus Christ,

how horrifying. Did the entire inn look like a gingerbread house to her, by chance?

“Hey, Rokuko. Can you eat iron and stuff, too?”

“Ah, umm. I might be able to if I try, but not that much. I can absorb it easily, though.”

Oh yeah. Soto’s ‘eating’ is probably the same thing as ‘offering treasure,’ one dungeon function for gaining DP. If one exploited the Absolute Authority like Aidy did, I bet every Core could eat just like that.

“Anyway, how are we gonna explain Soto to the villagers? Just tell them I had a secret child all along?”

“She’ll probably be treated as Niku’s little sister that way,” Rokuko replied.

Oh yeah. Everyone was treating Niku as my daughter for some reason. By which I mean, because of our black hair.

“My little sister?” Niku repeated.

“I have a sister! Yaaay, big sis, could you wear tights for me from now on?”

“Tights? Okay. I’ll start wearing them tomorrow.”

“Yees! White, I want white tights! You’re so cute, sis, I love you!” Soto exclaimed, gripping Niku in a tight hug.

Don’t tell me she likes the color white because she’s being influenced by Rin the wolf-slime thing through the bomb.

“Well, putting aside the villagers for now... There’s still the problem of introducing Soto in general. What to do about this...”

“Oh, by the way, I already sent a text to Haku.”

“What?!” I yelped in pure terror, only for Rokuko to shake her head with exasperation.

“Look, having a daughter is a big deal. She’d just get more mad if we kept it secret. Do you think we could hide it from Misha and Dolce? Hmmm?”

“...Okay, no, we couldn’t.” In which case, it was better to just get it over with. Getting a direct reply would help minimize the damage... I had one objective

here: survive. That would be my win condition. I could stand to lose an arm or two.

“By the way, uh, did Haku reply?”

“Not yet... Oh, there it is.”

Eek! This is terrifying! I don’t know if I want to ask what it says!

“A-And? What’d Haku say?”

“Eheh, take a look, Keima. She’s blessing us.”

“Okay, let’s see.”

The text which Rokuko so smugly showed me went like this: *Congratulations, Rokuko. This is all so very sudden, but I’m sure any daughter of yours is absolutely adorable. I want to bless you and her directly, so I’ll make time to visit tomorrow. Make sure Keima doesn’t run away, okay?*

Yeah, that was a message that blessed Rokuko and Soto. I was not mentioned in a good light whatsoever.

“Which means we’re going to the [Ivory Beach] tomorrow,” Rokuko said.

“Guh. I wanna run away.”

“Nuh-uh. You’re Soto’s papa, Keima. Introducing her to Haku is an important road for you to walk as a parent, so get a grip.”

I glanced at Soto. She looked at me with hope-filled eyes, for some reason.

“Ngh... Fine, alright.”

And thus it was settled.

* * *

I could hardly sleep with death so rapidly approaching. I needed a plan, and to that end I headed to the dungeon’s coliseum. There I would build the equipment I needed to survive Haku.

I guess it’s finally time. Time to make a gun. I’ve managed to hold back for this long, but I’m out of options. Though... maybe guns won’t be that strong in this world. You’re dead when you’re out of bullets, after all. Guns have strength

when it comes to making commoners into soldiers, but individuals with mana like mine are definitely stronger with magic than guns. Bullets are fast enough to hit said normal people, but I imagine that once you reach a certain level of expertise, you'll hit maybe the first bullet but then no more. That is, if they don't dodge that first bullet after sensing your killing intent or whatever. Also, gunshots are loud enough that they might dodge easily after the sound warns them.

Maybe I could make a full metal jacket of orichalcum to pierce the enemy's armor? That'd be kind of a huge waste, since there would be no getting those bullets back. I'd only make one or two for Soto to use in an emergency... Wait, I need to be thinking of my own equipment here. Right, how about I finally unleash electricity, which I had likewise been avoiding up until now? I've got copper, iron, and magnets. I can even buy rubber with DP, which means I can make electromagnets. If I make them into a Golem, I could have a Golem Dynamo right there. Even winding coils would be easy if I used Golems like lathes.

But what would I even use electricity for? Golems could turn motors on their own, and magic tools provided plenty of light. Railguns? I don't know enough to make those. Wait, is electricity kind of useless here? I could run electricity through water to make hydrogen... but buying hydrogen flat out with DP would be better. Ehhh. I had to hide the existence of the Golems from normal people, which was inconvenient, but it wasn't like any of this would be useful against Haku. Magic was still stronger.

"...{Element Shot}." A beam of light shot out and pierced the coliseum's wall.

Yeah, that's stronger and faster than most weapons, and I can shoot it out like a Gatling gun. Also, I can shoot it without chanting, so I don't even need to worry about covering my mouth.

If I were to make a weapon for myself, it would be much better to think of ways to use magic than ways to exploit my old Japanese science knowledge. Electricity would just have to be something I sold to someone else to develop. It would be good for improving the lives of people, but on a personal level, it meant nothing due to the DP catalog and magic. Guns, on the other hand, would just introduce the risk of someone shooting me out of nowhere, so nah.

Yeah, I'm just gonna keep both of those to myself, like I have been. Right.

Magic would be a good enough weapon, but what really mattered was my defense. Not even the strongest weapon in the world would matter if you died before you could use it. Thus, I decided to make specialty armor. Or more specifically, a power suit. We had the Dai-Frame as a rideable work Golem, but it had a major flaw: the huge gaps in the frame. They were made for construction, and thus had no armor. Or rather, they were kept breezy for vision purposes, and the person inside would die easily from stabs and the like. It had been pretty dangerous when I fought Aidy before. If not for the pilot being a fake made with Rei's illusions, I would have died countless times.

And so, this time I was making an armored Golem. It seemed like a good idea to repurpose the Golems with full plate armor that had been gathering dust in the Master Room ever since I made them for Rei and the other's naming ceremony. They had survived Soto's feasting since they were too big to comfortably put in {Storage}.

Anyway, the plan was to utilize the know-how I got from the Dai-Frames to make joints with an orichalcum alloy to make smooth Golem Assistance, while also using a honeycomb structure to lessen the armor's weight. Covering the honeycombs with orichalcum should result in equal defensive power regardless of the empty insides. Oh, and I would want some kind of insulator on the inside to soften it.

As for my remaining stock of orichalcum, well, it was in pretty dire straits due to Soto eating the orichalcum blade we got from Father. I figured I could use one of the thumb-sized Orichalcum Golems cloned by the boss spawner (that we also got from Father) to get the orichalcum I needed. It would just about suffice for a thin layer of plating, though it would have to be very thin indeed.

Also, since it took a full month for the Orichalcum Golems to regenerate, we didn't exactly have much of a stock here. Why was it that thumb-sized Golems took a month when he said even a Red Dragon would only take two weeks? Is it because they were made of material that was just too useful? That was possible.

I got right to work. I scattered the suit of armor and started punching out the

honeycombs. The orichalcum wouldn't last if I had to cover the inner parts of the honeycombs, so I covered them with a layer of iron à la aluminum foil, then put on the orichalcum plating.

Aaah. This is tedious, but comfy.

The removed hexagons of iron clattered on the floor as I worked my way through the armor. I lifted up a fully honeycombed piece of the armor and felt for myself how much lighter it was. Naturally, such thorough honeycombing would weaken the armor, but the orichalcum plating on top strengthened it right back up. And so, it ended up gleaming with the color of orichalcum... Yeah, it was kind of lame how wearing a full suit of orichalcum armor would lead to constant shining.

I mean, this kind of shining is reserved for when the protagonist awakens to his true power and achieves his final form, no? It kinda hurts my eyes, so I'm just gonna hide it beneath a layer of paint. Simple is best here. Simple is best.

That said, the eye slits were actually a terrifying weak point. Maybe breaking a mana potion and mixing the glass with orichalcum dust would make bulletproof glass... Nope. I would have liked to make a full face helmet, but... *Wait. This armor is a Golem, which means it's a monster, which means I can see through its vision using the monitor.* If I place that vision on the inside parts of goggles... Okay, yeah, it's hard to focus my eyes. Guess I'm done for... No! I can use the principles that VR goggles are founded on and use those glass lenses from before.

If I bend the footage around it... Done! It works! I ended up sticking VR goggles into the old helmet, but this lets me see while still protecting my eyes! A normal person would end up blind in here, but that doesn't matter since I'm the only one who's going to use it! Oh, I know! I can use the water cutter magic tool I put on the Iron Haniwa Golem, too... Er, wait, I still just want to use magic for combat. This is good enough for my armor. I don't have time to mess around, this should do it.

And so, I built a suit of armor in the coliseum nobody visits. I honeycombed parts, then painted over them in a loop that continued until apparently the sun rose and set. Rokuko came all the way to get me. I yawned, and started to put

on the finished armor with bleary eyes.

“Come on Keima, it’s time to go! She’s waiting!”

“Whoa, wait!”

Despite having only put on the greaves, Rokuko pulled me away and took us to the [Ivory Beach] where Haku was waiting.

* * *

Rokuko, Soto, and I went to the [Ivory Beach]. Rokuko couldn’t move Soto with her placement function, so she followed in my {Storage}. Which made sense, given she lived in my {Storage} to begin with, but...

Gaah, I wish I had more than just the greaves. I should’ve put the armor into {Storage}, but I missed my chance since I left it out so the paint could dry. Crap.

“So you’ve finally arrived. I’ve been waiting,” came a voice. There she was: the lord of darkness known as the Ivory Goddess. I didn’t want to come. I really didn’t want to come. *What’s with that black aura radiating off her? Why do I feel the ground itself trembling in her presence?*

“Morning, sister!”

“Good morning, Rokuko. You are as cute as ever today,” Haku said, her attitude shifting on a dime the second she turned to Rokuko. It felt like she was deftly avoiding Rokuko with all the murderous intent she was shooting my way. I wanted to vomit.

She hugged Rokuko and patted her head, then turned to smile at Soto. “So, this is the unnumbered Core you mentioned?”

“N-N-Nice to meet you, Auntie Haku!”

“Auntie... Mm, I suppose I am your aunt, since you’re Rokuko’s daughter. And what might your name be?”

“R-Right! I’m Soto! I-I’m, I’m in your care!”

“Why are you groveling?”

Hey! No fair, Soto! If you grovel before her first, I’ll miss my opportunity to do the same! I need to chain her off and get on the ground, too... Oh no, the

greaves are in the waaay! I should have modified them to be easier to move in!

“Please, stand up. You being Rokuko’s daughter means you’re my niece, no? Your head is that of a noble, and not one to be lowered too easy.”

“Y-Yesh, ma’am!” Soto jumped up like a toy spring. Haku gave a refined giggle at that.

A-Are we forgiven n— Oh, just Soto. Okay, I understand, no need for all the murderous energy. I’ll just die now. Gah, the greaves stopped me from groveling... To think the armor I made to protect myself actually dragged me down!

“Here now, Soto,” Haku said with a soft smile while beckoning her over.

“R-Right, auntie,” Soto replied, and got squished in a hug between Rokuko and Haku. *Man, I bet that smells nice. Not that I’ll ask to trade places with her. Because I would be murdered.*

“Ahaha, you have Rokuko’s eyes. So adorable.”

“Aaaah, you’re so beautiful! Oof, oof, I’m falling in love! I want to be your socks!”

What the absolute hell is my daughter saying?

“Sister, her pitch-black hair is just like Keima’s, don’t you think?”

“Mm, that does subtract a few points. But the fault lies not with her.”

“What?! I’ll dye it, then! Red, blue, white, blonde, whatever! Papa, you have items for that, right?!”

Hey! You got that hair from me, treat it better! I shouted internally, but my protests were silenced by a sudden cold shiver running down my back.

“Papa, hmm...? I see. Papa. Keima...?” Haku said, finally directing her ice-cold smile my way.

Alright. I missed my chance to grovel a second ago, but now’s my time to make up for that.

“You are prepared to lose, oh, four or five of your arms for this, yes? I will listen to your last words afterwards.”

“Er, you do know humans only have two arms, right?”

“Perhaps you are less used to this world than I thought. This world has a very convenient torture tool by the name of Restoration magic, you know. I shall teach you of its virtues firsthand. Learning through experience makes it harder to forget, no? Though, whether you survive to make use of that experience is another story entirely.”

Eek?! You can use Restoration magic like that?!

“Oh, and now that I think about it, you even have {Ultra Transformation}. A splendid skill that lets you die three times per day. How convenient for cases where my hands slip. Though I have such experienced, skilled servants that they would never make mistakes like killing a human; it is mere insurance.”

“Th-Those servants do sound nice to have! Well, if you’ll excuse me, I have to get going...”

“You think you can escape?”

The run function doesn’t work in the Demon King boss fight?! That doesn’t make sense, Haku isn’t even in the Demon King faction!

“Sister, come on. That’s enough teasing Keima. Let’s talk,” Rokuko said. Haku clicked her tongue.

“Keima... You will explain the meaning of this, yes?”

“Er, an unforeseen accident occurred.”

“I see. You failed to use protection due to an accident? Now, you have committed the sin of defiling and knocking up Rokuko despite Misha and Dolce keeping their eyes on you—but just how large of a sin did you commit? How many times do you wish to be executed, hmmm?”

Gaaah! Her murderous intent is getting even more thick! Haku’s emitting such a horrifying aura I could probably sense how she plans to execute me if I just got near her! I-I’m sorry!

“Hmm? Wait, sister. What does ‘knocking up’ mean?” Rokuko asked, putting a hand on her mouth.

“Raising a child in one’s stomach, no? This child... Soto, came from you, no?”

Haku asked, stroking Rokuko's hair. Stroke stroke. Pat pat.

"Eek! That tickles, sister. Oh, 'knocking up' means impregnating someone."

"That's right. Ngh, and I even went out of my way to avoid describing this. Which means Keima taught you..."

"Oh, no. I learned about it from a couple in the town, not Keima."

"...Oh, really? I see, well, I suppose that will happen in a town... Ngh, and thus her mind was defiled... Perhaps I should wipe it off the map? No, it's too late for that, and it's something I should have taught her. I will spare them," Haku said, muttering some pretty violent things to herself.

"Also, it was Keima who got knocked up, sister. Though it was his {Storage}, not his stomach."

"...Hmmm??? Is Keima not the father here?" Haku asked, tilting her head.

Soto shot her hand up. "Auntie! I'm only calling him papa because humans call men papas! He's actually my mama. That's a secret, though!"

"Hm...? I..." Haku blinked. "Rokuko. Could you tell me how exactly this child was given life?"

"Ummm, do you remember the Dungeon Core that Keima got from Father before? He was keeping it in his {Storage} the whole time, and..."

"Wait, *that* Core? The one he got after the battle with Core 564?"

"Right, that one. It all started with..." Rokuko began, and as Haku listened to the explanation, her murderous aura faded.

"Aaah, I-I see... I suppose a child born through human means would not get so large so fast. So you used the method I taught you earlier... I see."

"I forgot about it until it happened... I only remembered your lesson after Soto was born."

"I see. In short, it truly was an unforeseen accident as Keima said. I-I see."

Huh. Seems like having her call me papa was a mistake.

Haku had understood me to be the father through Rokuko's text and thus concluded that we had made a child through the non-divine method. She

thought we had skipped over marriage and gotten right to doing the dirty deed.

“You know, sister. Now that I think about it... you lied to me about sexual reproduction, didn’t you?”

“Ngggh?! Er, no, I-I, you have the wrong idea. I just, well...”

“That’s so cruel. I believed in you... But making children certainly does come with a lot of responsibility. You must have wanted to avoid me having a child before I was ready so much that you even lied for my sake. Right?”

“Y-Yes! That’s exactly right, Rokuko!”

“Then you’ll accept Keima as Soto’s parent, right?” Rokuko gave a bright smile. Haku faltered with a choke.

“You didn’t know the divine method of making children, correct?” Haku asked, shooting me a glare with her pupils glowing red.

“N-Not at all! I didn’t know anything!”

“No reaction from the lie detector. Very well, I will forgive you this time... in honor of cute little Soto.”

“Yes ma’am! Thank you very much!”

She forgave me! I get to live with my five limbs! Thank you, Soto. I’ll tell Ichika to give you her freshly removed socks later! I’ll even toss in Kinue’s!

“A shame that the torture devices I prepared will go unused...”

“H-Hahaha...”

Haku dropped loads of pointy, sharp weapons out of her {Storage}. Her going out of her way to show me them was probably her way of warning me that there would be no next time. *I hear you, loud and clear.*

“Wow, these look tasty. Auntie Haku, can I eat these?” Soto asked, drooling as she looked at the weapons.

“Erm. They are not food, but... I suppose, you may eat them if you want? What?”

“Yaaay! Thank you!” Soto squealed, then tossed all of Haku’s torture implements into her {Storage}, or rather, her dungeon. That was easier for Haku

to accept as a fellow Dungeon Core than her suddenly biting down on them.

“I knew it, they have magic enchantments! Aaah, so tasty... I’m filled with energyyy!”

“Oh my. I see, so that {Storage} is your dungeon. And by eat, you meant absorbing them. Hm... What does it look like on the inside?” Haku asked, peering into the pitch-black {Storage} dungeon with great interest.

“Do you want to go inside? Eheheh, I don’t mind giving you a special invitation to visit, auntie. Oh, but you have to pay with your socks... Your tights will do just fine.”

“Um, my tights?”

Noooo! Soto! Don’t say stuff like that, she’ll say it’s my fault and have me hanged! And I haven’t even raised you at all yet! I’m your parent, but who would say I raised you like this in a single day?!

“Ah, you’re playing around? I see. One moment.”

In a shocking twist, Haku slid her fingers beneath her black tights, slid them down right in front of me without any shame, then handed them to Soto!

“Will that do?”



“E-Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeep! Really?! These are Goddess-tier legendary rares! These are going into the museum for sure! Thank you, thank you so much! They will be my family’s sacred treasure forever!” Soto said, bowing her head in respect while holding up the tights reverently. She had just been told not to lower her head so lightly, but Haku was so overwhelmed by the enthusiasm she didn’t even comment on it.

“I-I am not sure what you are getting at here, but... may I come inside?”

“Yes! Yes, of course, come right in! Though it’s a tiny dungeon with nothing in it!”

“I’ll be going inside, then.”

“Watch your step! It’s dark!”

The instant Haku jumped into the {Storage} and disappeared out of sight, Soto chomped down on the tights and swallowed them all at once. She had no need to hold back when it came to food thanks to her {Teensy Reproduction}. Or rather, the sooner she ate it, the sooner she could make infinite copies.

Still... I hate to say this, but seeing my own daughter wolf down tights with her cheeks bulging is kind of, uh, uncomfortable.

“Mmm! Fwaah, s-so GOOOOOD! It tastes too good, m-my knees are giving out! I’m falling over! I can’t stand! Mama, hold me up!”

“Mm? Good grief. You really are Keima’s daughter.”

Hey, why are you blaming me for this? She’s your daughter, too, Rokuko.

“Oh, by the way, Auntie Haku’s moving around in my dungeon just fine. Weird, time should be stopped in there.”

“Oh, right, it turns out that Dungeon Cores... or rather demigods... don’t have their time stopped inside {Storage}. It doesn’t stop for Rokuko, either.”

“Oh, neat. Big sis Niku ended up frozen inside of it, so I was wondering.”

Hey, what the heck were you two doing while I was busy making armor?

We chatted for a second, and not long afterwards Haku returned from {Storage}.

“The structure reminds one of Rokuko’s past methods, but there were rooms and everything. It was far larger than a normal {Storage}.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Did you not know? Goodness, do your research. Soto’s life depends on her dungeon.”

“I mean, humans end up frozen in there, so. Can’t even use lights.”

“A fair point, I suppose,” Haku said with a sigh.

Wow. I thought Haku would’ve told me to investigate at the risk of my life. Maybe she’s so caught off guard from all this that she’s not in the mood for hostility. Though either way, I wouldn’t be able to do anything once my time stopped. I could give directions to Rokuko and Soto, though.

“Oh, that reminds me. I had a job I wanted to ask you to handle, Keima. Though you can refuse if you’d like, of course,” Haku said with a smile. *Ah. This is not one I can refuse.*

“Yeah? Ask me anything.”

“It seems the first prince of Daide visited Goren the other day. In truth, some troublesome business is occurring in Daide.”

Troublesome business, huh?

“First of all, do you recall our very own imperial princess, Emmymephy? The second prince of Daide has proposed to her.”

“Er, congratulations?”

“Think before you speak. A mere prince of Daide would never be allowed to marry anyone from the imperial family.”

“I see.”

The kingdom of Daide was a backwater country compared to the empire, and a prince was more or less equivalent to a low-ranked archduke. If they insisted on the marriage, they could at least explore the avenue of Daide being absorbed into the empire as a duchy, but it was better not to do that since Daide bordered so many other countries and there were a lot of complex

circumstances. Even if they both wanted to get married, the chances of it happening were basically zero, and on top of that, Emmymephy wasn't actually interested.

"Couldn't you just reject him instantly, though...? I guess there's some reason you haven't."

"Very astute. We investigated why he would make such a preposterous proposal in the first place, you see."

Naturally, there were circumstances behind his request. Those circumstances were the key issue here.

Haku paused, then continued with a serious expression. "Beddhism has begun to spread in Daide... and it seems there is a black-haired, red-eyed woman there claiming to be a Beddhist nun."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" I asked. That was undoubtedly Leona, and Leona wasn't someone I could handle on my own.

"Just investigate the situation. If possible, I would like you to drag Leona before me, but I won't ask the impossible. For now, just learn what you can."

Oh no, she wants me to investigate Chaos? This is really not something I want to do.

"Also, there are other problems arising there, it seems. No doubt they are related."

"What problems?"

Haku opened her mouth as if to speak, then stopped and shook her head. "No... I believe you will have to see for yourself and report what you find. I sent Wataru ahead of you, and it seems that handling this is beyond him."

What terrible problem would it have to be for Wataru to be unable to handle it?

"I sent Emmymephy there under the guise of being a foreign exchange student with Wataru as her guard... but Wataru cannot comprehend the problems."

"He can't... comprehend them?"

“Yes. Likely due to his {Ultra Good Fortune}, the problems are avoiding him entirely. He unconsciously finds himself walking down different paths as if avoiding something.”

In short, Wataru couldn't encounter the problems that were happening because they were beyond his ability to handle. He had the most powerful guard system of all time, which stopped him from encountering danger at all. Truly, {Ultra Good Fortune} was a terrifying means of self-defense.

“Emmymephy likewise has encountered no major problems due to Wataru protecting her, but... the reconnaissance troops I sent have all vanished. Their last message was that they would investigate a location that Wataru had been avoiding. No doubt they were erased,” Haku said with a smile.

Yeah, this sounds dangerous. Is she sending me there as an indirect way of telling me to go die? Probably. Yeah... Seems like she told Emmymephy to stick with Wataru at all times so she wouldn't get killed. I wanna stick with Wataru, too.

“I suspect you will learn more by visiting Daide yourself, so I will say no more. Do your best investigating. And send reports through texts often.”

“Er, got it.”

And so, I accepted the job from Haku.

But why, what's my reward...? Oh, er, right, never mind.

* * *

And so, I safely arrived back at the Goren town chief's residence. I slept and woke up to make sure it hadn't been just a dream, and indeed my heart was still functioning properly.

“I'm alive! I survived!”

“You did it, papa! Yaaaay!”

“Yep. Thanks, Soto. And thanks to you, too, Rokuko. Praise be to all life!”

Rokuko shrugged with an exasperated expression as Soto and I high-fived.

“You always exaggerate so much, Keima. Haku was just teasing you.”

“No way.”

If I had ‘defiled’ Rokuko as a human, I would be ten feet underground right now. In the sense of being buried alive.

“By the way, Soto. Haku didn’t say anything about time being stopped for other things when she was in your dungeon, right? Can you control the time inside your dungeon at will?”

“Yup, I sure can! Though I can’t make it go faster than real time.”

Oho.

“So that means I could just go in and investigate normally, right? Why didn’t you say that to Haku?”

“Wha? I mean, papa... Aren’t you hiding everything you can from Auntie Haku? I thought I should hide stuff, too! I didn’t tell her about {Teensy Reproduction}, either!”

Oh, huh, she knows me pretty well. Maybe that stuff was passed onto her. She probably didn’t tell me about it beforehand so I didn’t say anything I shouldn’t when the time came.

“Well, whatever. I’ll want to explore your dungeon, then. How about it? It’s my {Storage}, too, so I wanna see how it’s holding up.”

“Okaaay. Oh, I’ll go ahead and make a room just for holding your stuff, papa! Gimme some DP!”

As expected. Haku said it was bigger than a normal {Storage}, so it makes sense it can be developed like a normal dungeon, too. This is kinda crazy.

“Don’t tell me you can connect it to other people’s {Storage}, too.”

“Wha? Should I not?”

“Uh.”

I said that as a joke, but apparently she actually could. Soto beamed. *Uh, hold on, that’s way too much. That’s dangerous in so many ways.*

“Ahaha, I’m just kidding. I can only connect it to mama’s, since she’s connected to your soul, to dungeon monsters’, and to Niku’s since she’s my

Master!”

“Makes sense, it wouldn’t be so easy to connect to other people’s {Storage}... Wait, whoa, that’s still crazy.”

Ehhh, well... At least she can’t casually steal from the {Storage} of random merchants passing by. I— Wait.

“Did you just say Niku was your Master?”

“Uh-huh, I made her my Dungeon Master yesterday! I figured the faster it got done, the better!”

“Seriously...?”

I cradled my head. Somehow, Niku had become a Dungeon Master overnight. There wasn’t anything wrong with that, exactly... Well, it was bad that we wouldn’t be getting DP from her anymore, but with a whole town funneling DP into our pockets, that wasn’t much of a blow. Well... Better this than some weirdo becoming her Master, I guess. In the sense that I ain’t givin’ my daughter to just anybody.

“So, what about the job Haku gave us?” Rokuko asked.

“Well... What can we do but go through with it? There’s a road from the imperial capital leading to Daide, so.”

“Just traveling will take a few days, then?”

Yeah... Traveling always takes a while, especially when going somewhere for the first time.

“Are you going to go alone?”

“Nah, I want a guard. I’d like to bring Niku, but.”

Rokuko nodded to herself and rubbed her chin, as if she suddenly had an idea. “You know, Keima. Don’t you think it would be sad for just the father to go on a business trip right after his first child was born?”

“What?”

“It would be! So, Soto and I are coming with you! It’s a family vacation!”

“Uh.” *A family vacation...?!*

“A vacation! Yay! We get to go on a trip!” Soto exclaimed.

“Soto can connect {Storages}, so if you want to keep her a secret, she has to follow you from the start. And if we use the Divine Bedding, you can use your {Teleportation} as much as you want, no?”

“Wait, hold on, you’re actually planning on coming?”

“Obviously. Don’t tell me you’re planning to take the Divine Bedding on your own,” Rokuko said, already tossing her luggage into her {Storage}. That was some haphazard preparation for a vacation.

Wait, anything we don’t have we can just ask Soto to bring? Being able to buy anything with DP was already enough of a cheat skill, but now with Soto we could send items to and from our base at will... This is like those items that show up in RPGs sometimes, that let you get stuff from your storage boxes from anywhere in the world.

And so, before I knew it, I was heading down the road to Daide from the imperial capital with Soto and Rokuko on a family vacation, with Niku and Ichika brought along as guards. How could this have happened to me?

* * *

So yeah, I used {Teleportation} down the road while recovering my mana on Rokuko’s lap pillow.

“Y’know Rokuko, I’m just gonna be real, aren’t I kinda out of place here on a family trip?” Ichika asked.

“It’s fine, you’re convenient to have hanging around.”

Adding more people didn’t even slow us down, since we could put them into Soto’s {Storage} dungeon and save mana by stopping their time. Which was good, since we were on this trip as nobles, and we would definitely need a servant experienced in those kinds of things.

“Still, Master. Pretty sure I heard Neruneh talking about how you hella turned down Rokuko’s lap pillow. What happened? Your face is glued to her thighs today, man.”

“Oh, you mean back during the Demon Realm trip. My hands were kinda tied

there. Haku had a spy with us.”

I had thought that Haku would have guards follow us on this trip, but for better or worse, she didn’t have any subordinates who were free who would have been suitable considering Rokuko and Soto’s special circumstances. Thus, although Wataru was waiting for us in Daide, we were pretty much just on our own until then.

“Man, feels like forever since we actually went somewhere with you, huh, Ichika?”

“For real. Think the last time was when we all hit B-Rank?”

“And back then, we had Wataru, Mephy, and Gozou’s gang with us,” Rokuko noted. I thought back to how dangerous it had been, with Rokuko getting kidnapped and all.

“Speaking of which. Have you ever been to Daide, Ichika?” I asked.

“Duh. Though I mean, it was forever ago, since it was before I got all enslaved and stuff, so I dunno how good of a guide I’ll be. Hopefully that store’s still around.”

“What, a restaurant you liked?”

“Yuppers. Daide’s got some hellu tasty grub. Get hype, my dude.” Ichika cackled. *Yeah, if Ichika says it’s good, it’s gonna be real good.*

“Well, you’ll still do better than any of us. Nobody else has been there.”

“That country’s got some real unique food culture since it’s surrounded by the empire, the Demon Realm, and the Holy Kingdom.”

“Do you know anything other than the food culture?”

“The gambling rules are tricky, too, since they’re all a big mishmash. You gotta double-check the rules before rolling the dice, I’m tellin ya. Alright? Promise me!”

Okay, yeah, figures. It’s Ichika we’re talking about. Food and gambling. I knew that.

I glanced at Niku and Soto while laying on the picnic sheet. They were playing

all over the place to kill time.

“Check this out, Niku. Nom nom nom... Fwah!”

“That was iron, wasn’t it...?”

Apparently Soto’s idea of fun was to stuff iron into her mouth to the point of puffing her cheeks out like a squirrel. Soto slapped said cheeks, and a hardened ball of iron rolled out. Did that mean iron softened when it was in her mouth?

“Man, Soto really is your and Rokuko’s daughter. She’s just like you,” Ichika said.

“Hmm? I think she looks more like Rokuko.”

“Nah, I’m talking about how she made that iron soft. You do the same stuff with your {Create Golem}, don’tcha?”

Now that she mentioned it, I could make iron all pliable like that, too. Which meant I could chew down iron, too...? Oh, wait, I wouldn’t be able to digest it. I could play around with it like rubber, though.

We kept watching, and Soto tossed the iron ball into her mouth like a marshmallow and munched it down.

“She’s gotta be absorbing or withdrawing that iron with her dungeon functions, right?”

“Dude, I don’t know why you think I would know.”

She sure is a dungeon, I thought with a warm heart. Er... Though I should probably teach her {Create Golem} and stuff with a scroll. Maybe she could make Golems in her mouth and do crazy stuff with that.

“Master. An enemy attack. How do we respond?” Niku asked.

“Hm?” I sat up and saw that she was holding an arrow in her hand.

Bandits, surprising no one. Though Niku casually grabbing the arrow out of the air sure was surprising. What a good guard; she acted like she was playing around while still keeping a solid eye out for threats.

“I would say kill them all, but I think we might as well use the opportunity to capture as many of them alive as possible. You can cut off their limbs if you

want, since we can just recover them anyway.”

“Understood,” Niku said before jumping off to attack the bandits. She beat them all in no time.

We took the opportunity to try closing the bandits into Soto’s {Storage} dungeon and experimenting to see if we could earn DP off them. We tossed them into dungeon jail cells while they were unconscious, and after some experimentation learned that while they didn’t earn DP when time was stopped, they earned about 500 DP a day under normal time. It seemed the passage of time was necessary to earn DP.

As for what came next for the bandits, Rokuko was excited at the prospect of our daughter having a DP source of her own, so we decided to just leave them in there. I felt a bit uncomfortable with bandits being in what was originally my {Storage}, but well, so it goes.

“Imperial law allows nobles to do what they want with any bandits they capture after getting attacked,” Rokuko said. “Their lives are literally ours, legally and practically. Eheheh.”

That begged the question of where she studied up on law, but apparently Dolce had informed her back in Goren. Rokuko was getting even more reliable!

But well, anyway, our road trip proceeded peacefully(?) like so, and after a number of days we arrived at Daide.

Side Chapter — High Succubus and Natsuno of Sorrow

The scene rewinds back to just after the Dungeon Battle between Keima's group and Core 564. A group of two Succubi, one High and one not, were walking in the midst of a certain forest within the Demon Realm.

It was an unreliable, narrow path surrounded by tall trees. One would be struck with unease over whether it was actually the correct path, but it was impossible to get lost when it only went one way. There were no people, only birds and bugs and stuff, but that was fine.

"Still, I thought for sure I was dead back there. What was up with those squirrels? I had no idea squirrels were so deadly. I'm going to have nightmares about this. Absolutely."

"My sympathies, Natsuno."

The High Succubus of the group was Natsuno of Sorrow, one of the Four Heavenly Kings of Core 564's dungeon. She had fled after surrendering to the threat of a group of highly murderous squirrels. Reason being, she ran the risk of being murdered by Core 564 for surrendering instead of fighting to the death or something of the like.

Now, as for the other Succubus...

"Are you sure about abandoning Core 564, too?" Natsuno asked.

"Oh yes, of course. I won't miss him in the least; he doesn't make me feel good at all. Not to mention, I've found a much more splendid joy."

It was the nameless Succubus that Core 564 had been punching in place of a sandbag. Who knew what methods she had used, but she, too, had escaped from that dungeon. And now she was walking in front of Natsuno as a guide.

"Anyway, unlike me, weren't you a Succubus born within that dungeon? I'm impressed you managed to betray him and run away at all," Natsuno said. It

was normal for monsters born within a dungeon to live and die with that dungeon. Under typical circumstances, it would be unthinkable for a monster to twist those rules and stealthily escape in a clear betrayal. However...

“That’s simple. Core 564 did not have much interest in me, or rather, us. Thus, I could contact *her* as much as I wanted. In truth, I became *her* servant before that battle even began.”

Indeed. The Succubus had always been serving someone else. Even before Keima and Core 564’s Dungeon Battle began.

“And amid this all, I was chosen for... no reason in particular. It was probably just coincidence. I offer my prayers to the divine.”

“By divine, you mean *her*, no?”

“Would I be wrong?” The succubus curved her lips in a grin. Her eyes, however, were not smiling at all.

“Not at all... I’m positive *she* is some kind of evil god,” Natsuno replied.

“A wise assessment.”

She had, after all, made the Succubus hide amid the carnage of the battle between Core 564 and Mikan, even when all her allies were slaughtered. Though Natsuno could hardly criticize her for that after pleading for her life and fleeing.

Natsuno had likewise been scouted by *her*, but unlike her Succubus companion, she didn’t feel as if she were a chosen one or anything like that. Though in truth, out of all of Core 564’s Succubi, only Natsuno and this other Succubus had been scouted, so it wouldn’t be too inaccurate to think that.

“Too bad we couldn’t bring everyone else with us,” Natsuno said.

“We could only disappear unnoticed by Core 564 thanks to their numerous sacrifices. It was necessary.”

“I would call you a huge bitch for saying that, but since I’m here with you, I’m hardly one to talk.”

“Thank you. Being called a huge bitch is high praise in this line of work.”

“Do all Succubi serving *her* end up like you? Maybe I should back out.”

“Ahaha, don’t worry. You’re planned to be a main player in her next project, you know.”

Natsuno could not help but get a bad feeling about the phrase ‘main player,’ much less ‘project.’

“Erm. What was that project again, by the way? I think the name was ‘Our Engagement Is Nullified You Dick (Webfic Style),’ which honestly I didn’t understand at all.”

“It’s an experiment... or rather, something like a play. I’m told you fit her image of the main heroine perfectly, Natsuno. Incidentally, she has already finished preparing methods to implant memories and modify personalities along the theme of a previously selfish noble girl getting visions of a future and learning she will be executed if she doesn’t change her ways.”

“Okay, you lost me. What exactly does your master want to do?”

“That is far beyond my understanding, but remember that *she* is your master as well now. Though, your status from this point forward will be that of the daughter of a baron within Daide.”

“That doesn’t answer my question. Which, I guess, means I have to think about it for myself,” Natsuno said. The Succubus smiled, and Natsuno couldn’t hide her sigh.

“I believe *she* is seeking you to act more than anything, Natsuno.”

“What does that even mean? This just gets more and more baffling...”

“For now, just look through this while you walk.” The Succubus handed Natsuno a stack of papers.

The high-quality sheets of equally sized papers were stamped with “Top Secret” and “Corporate Documents” with big red stamps, and the letters on them were oddly uniform. *Perhaps this is the printing I’ve heard rumors about*, Natsuno thought to herself while flipping through sheet after sheet and skimming over them.

“Is this a world-building document? She must want me to act according to

this. Hm... The amount of detail is kind of a pain. What's all this about me being a noble's hidden child that lived as a commoner? And a list of targets to ensnare...?"

"It will be trivial for a High Succubus such as yourself, no? Oh, and that list is purely for reference. You can pick just a single one, or ensnare someone not on the list at all. When the time comes, you will be in complete control. She said you can try out whatever you like."

"Her plans boggle the mind. Oh... This plan includes conquering a prince. A Succubus must have made this after all. Wow, this could actually let us take over the whole country, huh?"

Natsuno could apparently do as she pleased, and that included just living her whole life as a baron's daughter without enrapturing anyone. Or she could enrapture the man she was engaged with, as planned. It was truly unfathomable what the one behind this hoped to accomplish.

"If you don't like it, there is still time to back out," the Succubus said.

"I never said I wouldn't do it. Might as well use this opportunity to have some fun. There's not a Succubus out there that doesn't dream of conquering a whole country! I'm going to do it!"

"Ahaha. A wise decision," the Succubus said, putting the knife she had stealthily drawn back into {Storage}. It was a long-bladed combat knife, meant for cutting through thick meat. On top of that, it had a Succubus-killing mana enchantment cast on it.

Natsuno continued onward to Daide with her companion, having no idea that if she had carelessly refused the offer, she might have met an untimely end.

"Incidentally, are we walking all the way to the country? You're not going to tell me to walk all the way to Daide, right?"

"I-I would like to think *she* would come get us along the way, but... We will likely need to leave the forest, at least."

The sharp chirps of birds could be heard as the two of them walked along the unreliable path in the middle of the forest.

Chapter 2

On the first day of the fifth month of this world's calendar, we arrived at Daide. It was a castle city a bit larger than Tsia, with orange brick walls surrounding it... Apparently this was the capital city, though that was a bit redundant to say, since Daide was a country with only one big city. There had been towns and smaller inn-focused cities along the way, though.

In retrospect, the fact the empire had so many cities this size was pretty abnormal. It was way too big. Or maybe since the Demon Realm was equally big, perhaps it was just Daide that was too small?

We underwent a search at the front gate to the capital. Our waiting time was exceedingly short, since we went through the gate for nobles. Still, I had to wonder how meaningful searches were in a world with {Storage}... One would think that smuggling would be easy as pie, but apparently the lie-detecting tools were there to stop just that. And they used them pretty freely, since nobles committed more large-scale crimes than commoners.

"Are you bringing anything illegal with you, or something that might be thought of as illegal? Any criminal history you need to report?"

"That's a no to either, though we do have bandits in {Storage} that attacked us on the way here. Any problem with that?"

"Not at all. Thank you for your cooperation."

Thus concluded the search. Everyone received the same questions. Luckily, the bandit gang in Soto's {Storage} was completely legal thanks to imperial law. Things would be different if we freed them within Daide, but that would be the separate crime of causing chaos through summoning, and didn't have anything to do with bringing them with us.

However, while the questioning itself ended without issue, when I handed over the letter from Haku (which she had told me to deliver at the gate), the guards took us to a waiting room and hurried off. The waiting room for nobles

was a pretty nice-looking parlor. The red sofa in particular was comfy as all hell. I bounced up when I sat on it, which made me want to jump on it like a trampoline... and Soto was actually doing it.

“Hey. That’s disrespectful, Soto.”

“Awww, but the sofa’s super bouncy, papa! Look at how high I go!”

“It is pretty rare for sofas to be like this,” Rokuko said. “Not even our inn’s massage chairs are this bouncy.”

Well, yeah. Those are just chairs with mattresses stuck on them, so they’re more about sinking into the softness. Same for the ones I sold Haku.

Incidentally, Niku and Ichika were serving as maid-cum-bodyguards, by which I meant they were standing solemnly by the wall. If you asked me, it would’ve been just fine for them to sit down, too. They were both B-Ranks and thus nobles, after all.

After about thirty minutes of waiting, we were finally greeted by... Wataru and Emmymephy. They were about the best visitors I could have asked for, though I was mainly referring to Wataru there, as a warder of evil. Emmymephy was just a bonus. I seemed to recall Haku mentioning something about her being told not to leave Wataru’s side under any circumstance. Heck, he was the one oasis of peace in the middle of Leona’s danger zone, so yeah, I didn’t want to leave his side, either.

“Heya, Keima! It’s been a while,” Wataru said.

“Yup. You’re looking pretty hyped up, my man.”

“Of course! Oh, and I see Rokuko, Ichika, and Kuro are all here too. And... Er, who’s the black-haired girl?” Wataru asked, looking curiously at Soto. This was their first time meeting, so his confusion made sense. I decided to introduce Soto honestly without hiding anything.

“This is my daughter, Soto.”

“Oh, your daughter... Wait, your daughter?! Wh-What?! When did this happen?!”

Wataru, naturally, was shocked. I ignored his surprise and turned to greet the

imperial princess, as was my duty as one of her humble citizens.

“Hello to you, too, Princess Mephy. It’s been a while.”

“Hi hi, Keima. I say, I’m just as surprised to hear you have a daughter!”

Looks like Emmymephy’s dying of curiosity, too. Oh well.

“Soto, say hello. Be polite, this is a Hero and the imperial princess here.”

“Okaaay. Nice to meet you! I’m Soto Goren! Teehee!” Soto greeted Wataru and Emmymephy with a cute smile that resembled Rokuko’s.

“I say, I like your spirit! I am Emmymephy Laverio. My friends call me Mephy, so you can, too.”

“Er, right, nice to meet you. I’m Wataru. Uh... Keima? Wh-Who’s the mother? Just asking to be safe.”

“Me, duh?” Rokuko answered, puffing out her chest while sniffing with pride.

“When did...? She’s so big...”

“Also, she’s my little sister,” Niku said, sliding forward.

“Kuro’s little sister... Wait, what?! Does that make you Keima’s daughter, too...? But you’re a beastkin...”

“They have different mothers. Happens all the time, doesn’t it?”

“I-I guess, maybe...? Wait, doesn’t that mean you’re keeping your daughter as a slave...?”

“She also has a different father.”

“That means you’re not related at all!”

“Hey, watch your mouth!” Soto exclaimed. “Me and big sis are connected by the soul! We’re soul sisters!”

“Correct. Soto and I are soul sisters.”

I tried correcting the misunderstanding to avoid any annoying problems, but Soto and Niku got annoyed enough at Wataru’s reaction that they got involved themselves. To be fair, since they were Dungeon Core and Dungeon Master, their souls were indeed literally connected.

“S-Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. You’re still family, even if not by blood.”

“I’m glad you understand!” Soto exclaimed, smugly forgiving Wataru.

“Well, just to be clear, Soto only became our daughter recently. I wasn’t hiding her from you or anything.”

“Er, wait, uhhh...”

“Don’t ask. Rokuko’s home life is one hell of a mess. You’re a noble, too, so you get what I mean, right?”

“Ah. Right. I can understand that... She is Haku’s sister, after all.”

I gave Wataru enough to fill in the gaps himself and left the rest to his imagination. He would probably come to a harmless conclusion, with the truth coming much later, if ever.

“Anyway, this isn’t the best place to talk. Want to come to our inn?” Wataru asked.

“Sounds good. We should have rooms already reserved in the same inn ourselves.”

We took Wataru up on his offer and headed to his inn in Daide. I’d have liked to stick with him this whole trip for safety purposes, but Haku told us to keep clear of him when we were investigating, at the very least. Sleeping in the same inn was fine, and if something happened in the night he could rush over in time and bless us with his {Ultra Good Fortune}. Hopefully. Please.

In any case, we finally stepped foot into the city proper. The gate led into a sizable main street, with medieval-looking buildings made of wood and orange bricks dotting the sides. And, as one would expect near such a large gate connecting the outside of the city to the inside, there were stands everywhere selling stuff. There hadn’t been many outside the gate, but that made sense considering the entrance fee.

“Oho, golly. This sure is different from the Daide I know,” Ichika said.

“Huh? Really?”

Apparently the Daide of her day had been a lot more deserted and open.

“Right, I heard they went through some rapid development recently,” Wataru said. “I think you’ll be pretty surprised, Keima. Look at that stand.”

He pointed at a stand. I looked, and found a stand selling delicious-smelling fried food, karaage. Beside that stand was one selling sweet-smelling baby castellas. Beside that stand, again, was one selling yakisoba with tantalizing sauce. In short, it was a lineup of very Japanese-esque food.

...Not that I can be critical, since in Goren I sold yakisoba and stuff flat out during the dragon incident, but Leona is definitely behind this.

“Y’knooow, Master. Food is culture. They say you can tell what’s up with a country by looking at their food, y’know?” Ichika said, glancing all over the place.

“Alright, alright, buy one of everything, whatever you want.”

“Thaaat’s my master for you! Be right back!”

I handed Ichika a number of silvers, and she happily skipped off to the stands.

“Man, isn’t it crazy to see stands like this outside of Goren?” Wataru asked, looking proud for some reason.

“Think they have a dungeon that drops this sauce and stuff, like the [Cave of Greed] does?”

“Nope. Turns out, they’re making it all themselves. Everything’s made from crops and the like farmed within the country, not stuff produced from dungeons.”

“Wow.”

Now that was impressive. Still, if people in Japan could make the sauces from natural materials, it only made sense that anyone could make them from similar materials. Though Leona was definitely involved here regardless.

“And I haven’t even gotten to the best part! The highest quality toilets here are... Actually, it’ll be more surprising if you experience it for yourself. Eheheh.”

I can guess from his expression that they probably have washlets, the oh-so-popular bidets in Japan. Might even have toilet paper. I considered inventing that stuff myself, but {Purification} kind of renders them pointless.

“Rokuko, I say, do I ever recommend the strawberry crepes. They’re delightfully cute dishes with sour strawberries enveloped by sweet cream. They make me think of Ichigo. Oh, and Ichigo is a minstrel whose songs and dances I’m quite fond of.”

“Hmm, a layer of cream wrapped around fruit... Do they have any melon ones?”

“Melon...? Did I ever tell you of the time I summoned an adventurer to speak, and he overate melons in his excitement to the point that he vomited? I say, take care not to eat too much of it yourself, Rokuko.”

“It’s fine, I’m built for eating endless melons.”

Not technically untrue, since Dungeon Cores can eat forever.

As we chatted, Ichika came back with an armful of food, and we all went to the inn.

“Still, I didn’t expect Daide to be so developed,” I said, seeing all sorts of evidence of the development Wataru had mentioned on the way to the inn.

“I know, right? At this point, the commoners here have a better quality of life than imperial commoners,” Wataru replied.

The most noticeable of all was the glass windows, probably. And it wasn’t just the buildings on the main street with them, either; even when we went into alleys and side roads, we could see into plenty of buildings. Which revealed that even the inside of the windows had a locking system used throughout Japan, the so-called crescent locks where you lifted a handle to activate the lock. That removed pretty much all doubt that it was Leona behind everything. I never thought we’d pick up on her trail so fast...

“Bit late for me to be saying this, but I see Neruneh isn’t with you,” Wataru said.

“Hm? Oh, yeah. We left her behind since she didn’t seem too interested in coming. No rumors of any special magic tools being developed here, after all. Also, it’s dangerous, isn’t it?”

“Aaah... Yeah, I guess so? I can’t really empathize, myself.”

Incidentally, it seems that Wataru took his detours without even being conscious of them. Apparently on our first day here we're already so close to instadeath danger that Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} is stepping in to save the day? Jesus Christ, how horrifying. Maybe I shouldn't have brought Rokuko and the others after all.

Also, the high-quality toilets that earned Wataru's high recommendations were washlets, as expected. They were entirely different from Japan's electronic washlets, however, and were instead sticks with buttons that dropped from a hose on the ceiling. The stick had a hole to let water out, and if you aimed your rear at the button, it would spray out and do some cleaning. But in the end, one would still use the Survival magic {Dry} anyway.

Really, it felt like {Purification} was still the way to go, but Wataru was so happy about it that I just kindly nodded and didn't bring that up.

* * *

The next day, Niku, Soto and I left to investigate Daide. Niku was wearing her personal clothes today rather than her maid outfit, so I ended up feeling like a father out on a trip with his two daughters.

Rokuko and Ichika were apparently going to go shopping with Emmymephy under Wataru's supervision. They would be, in their own way, searching for things that didn't quite fit in this world, with Wataru's Japanese perspective as an aid. Rokuko and Ichika would probably handle that just fine.

"So, what now, papa?"

"What now, Master?"

With two lolis looking to me for guidance, I laid out the first step of my plan.

"Let's go to the church first. That'll be faster than anything."

What had my curiosity more than anything was Beddhism. As the pope of Beddhism, I needed to give this land's branch a once-over. It was definitely planted here by Leona, and nothing would start if I didn't check the place out. I uncovered the location of the church quite easily by asking a chef at the stand we stopped by for breakfast.

We headed to the church while wolfing down the breakfast we bought.

“Tacos! What a weird name, huh, Niku!” Soto exclaimed.

“They taste good. They’re like a salad wrap.”

Ehhh. These tacos are literally tacos. The salad wraps we had at the city of Mikan were similar, but they were called salad wraps, not tacos... I wonder if the auto-translator is causing any problems here? Eh, it’s beyond me.

“Oh. Soto. I should’ve said this earlier, but outside, call her Kuro instead of Niku. Or just ‘big sis’ if you want. Alright?”

“Okaaay.”

“...Understood.” Niku shook her tail with a bit of dissatisfaction at Soto agreeing to that.

Anyway, we arrived at the Beddhist church, but it hit me that I was, indeed, the pope. I had to question whether it would be better for me to state my identity or hide it... Though, thinking about it, I had never been here before. They would probably just look at me like I was crazy if I claimed to be the pope.

I tried approaching the church and checking the place out. First things first, I looked it over. There were no glass windows here, with there instead being wooden shutters that opened from the inside. And... Actually, the church had signs of being reconstructed at points, and didn’t feel at all like a church that had been recently built. It looked, at the very least, like it was ten, no, fifty years old. I wouldn’t even be surprised if it was over a hundred years old, but naturally I had no idea since I wasn’t an expert.

“Sure feels like a church with history...”

“Can I eat it?”

“Uh? No.” *What are you, a baby that wants to put everything into their mouth? Though then again, you are zero years old, so... Okay.*

Next, I looked at the believers going in and out of the church. Men and women of all ages and wealth demographics were streaming in and out, indicating the universal compassion of the church. They also had the hole-in-center coins hanging from their necks. In short, the same holy symbol we used

at our church. That was probably good enough proof that Leona was spreading Beddhism here. Though it was also possible a smith coincidentally cloned them... Though, nah, not like there would be any other church with a dumb pun name like Beddhism.

But really, “stream” was an accurate term to use here. A ton of believers were going in and out. In a surprising twist, it was a lot busier than the cozy church back in our town. The fact this was a capital city with a higher population was certainly a factor, but still. Either way, hiding my status as pope and infiltrating as a normie seemed reasonable.

“Alright, we’re heading in as traveling Beddhists.”

“Understood. You should use an iron holy symbol instead, Master.”

“Good point. And for Soto... Oh, no, wait. We can act like we’re trying to baptize her into Beddhism.”

“That sounds fun, papa!”

I put on an iron holy symbol Niku gave me rather than my usual one. Now, onward into church.

“So this is a Beddhist church!” Soto exclaimed.

“Oooh, they sure are big in cities, huh!”

“Indeed. Let us get you baptized promptly, Soto.”

We thus entered the church with a bit of bad acting. The inside was basically as stereotypically holy as you could get. The artistic interior design aped baroque designs, and felt entirely like a western church.

The nuns were greeting the believers with chants of “oyasuminasai,” and the believers smiled back. In the process they picked the holy symbols up off their chests and tapped them together, which was a Beddhist greeting done in Goren as well.

Pretty peaceful church they have here. Maybe because the nuns aren’t Succubi?

That reminded me, I had a ring Succubus on my hand: Kosaki. I glanced down, only just then remembering she was guarding me like always. She sent a

telepathic message that she didn't sense any Succubus energy from the nuns, which meant they were probably normal humans, yeah.

"Oyasuminasai. Are you here to pray?"

"Aah, my daughter here said she wanted to join Beddhism just like me."

"Oh my! That's splendid. Your beastkin daughter here... already has a symbol, so it must be this other one, correct?"

"That's right! It's me! What do I have to do to join?" Soto energetically asked.

"Nothing in particular; you are a Beddhist disciple the moment you wish to be a member of the Beddhist church yourself. It is a sub-religion, so you may even continue practicing your original religion."

"Yaaay! I'm a Beddhist!"

"Indeed, and I am your witness. You are now a Beddhist."

It seemed even here joining Beddhism was easy as pie. They even kept up the whole sub-religion thing.

"You may buy holy symbols at the store over there if you would like," the nun said, pointing at a little shopping corner. It was a wooden stand, which also sold pillows and potions alongside the holy symbols. We thanked her and headed that way.

"Papaaa, buy me a symboool."

"Hey now, don't pull."

Soto made a cute begging pose. The way she gripped my sleeve and pulled me to the store was the quintessential image of a daughter begging for something from her father; truly, she was an expert. Even I couldn't tell if she was acting or speaking from the heart.

"You, too, big sis! Hurry, hurry!"

"Understood, Soto. Ah... They don't have any iron holy symbols."

"Awww, what? I wanted one to match yours and papa's!"

As Niku said, there were silver and bronze holy symbols, but nothing else. No iron or gold. Though maybe they just weren't there due to being too expensive

or something.

“Excuse me, do you have iron holy symbols?”

“Oh, iron holy symbols? You have to get those specially ordered.”

Incidentally, bronze holy symbols cost three bronzes, while silver ones cost two silvers. Irons had to be specially ordered, and cost about a silver and fifty bronzes. Surprisingly expensive.

“Strange. Iron’s the most popular one back in the empire.”

“Oh, imperials, are we? Well, iron’s a bit more sparse over here.”

There were bronze mines here (albeit not dungeon mines), so bronze was especially cheap. I seemed to recall the prince who came to our town saying something similar. Iron wasn’t impossible to buy, but almost all of it was imported.

Given that they’re importing from the empire, it’s possible some of the Golem iron from our town is here. Feels weird.

“Still, this is a pretty grand church. And here I thought Beddhism was founded just recently,” I said, playing dumb and asking the nun about the building while having Soto settle for just a bronze holy symbol (as per the act).

“Oh yes, this is quite a historied church.”

“What kind of history?” I asked, feeling a bit confused because I knew for a fact I had made Beddhism just recently.

“You see, this church has been around for over eight hundred years, since before the kingdom of Daide was first founded.”

“Oh, so it wasn’t originally a Beddhist church? It was a church for some other religion?” That made sense; nothing strange about an unrelated church having a lot of history.

Or so I thought, but the nun shook her head. “No, no. This is a church of Ancient Beddhism.”

“Ancient... Beddhism?”

“Yes. Ancient Beddhism. To further explain...”

Ancient Beddhism. Such was the name of the religion which worshiped the one and only creator god who created the world in the long past.

The history of the religion traced back to the world's creation itself, and in fact existed before the concept of 'religion' even formed. All humans, or rather, all living creatures, were joined together in harmony beneath the peace-praising Beddhism, and offered their prayers in sleep. Beddhism was practiced by all living things.

And thus, Ancient Beddhism was nothing special at all. It was simply the way of life for everyone, and so melted away over time, until its tenets were so violated by the modern day that it was abruptly reborn.

"And so, while modern-day Beddhism is simply a sub-religion, in truth it is backwards. Beddhism is the true primary religion, the fundamental block upon which everything else is founded. The gods currently being worshiped are the true sub-religions."

"So you're saying Beddhism is the church for the creator god, then?"

"Not so. That was the case for Ancient Beddhism, but the creator god has now gone, too, oyasuminasai... Modern Beddhism worships no gods, and exists for the sake of the people."

In short, modern Beddhism was both the rebirth of Ancient Beddhism, and something else at the same time.

"So, why did Beddhism revive now of all times, exactly?"

"As I mentioned, this church has existed since before the kingdom of Daide was founded. The people of the city hadn't the faintest idea where it came from or why it had been built, but the holy pope taught us of its origin, and with it, the history of Ancient Beddhism."

Ahhh. Okay, yeah, Leona. Now that I think about it, Leona did mention something about Ancient Beddhism herself... Wait, pope?

"Er, did you just say the pope taught you? Not a nun, or anything?"

"Indeed, the pope."

Hm.

“Uhhh. Is the pope’s name Leona by any chance? Black hair, red eyes?”

“Hm? The pope’s name is Lord Tindalos. He is the commander of this country’s mage corps, and the pope of new Beddhism.”

Who the fuck? I mean, I guess she just told me. The commander of the mage corps?

“By the way, when did this pope start spreading Beddhism again?”

“There are many theories, with the most common being either ten years ago or even just one year ago. Though one year ago is surely impossible. The religion was around when I was a child, after all.”

“Huh.”

As far as I could tell, the nun was about twenty years old. That was pretty much impossible, then. Were her memories being altered?

From there, the nun happily told me all sorts of historical tidbits about the church, like the statue with a broken arm, the ancient origins of various scrapes on a pillar, and so on.

Wow, so this stone statue broke when the creator god’s child tossed it in the Bedding Wars around six hundred years ago. Yeah, you heard me, “Bedding Wars.” In short, the war over who got to sleep on the top bunk in a bunk bed... Wait, they’re kids?!

Naturally, all that information came straight from the pope. It was even checked out by someone who could use analysis skills.

Consider the famous thought experiment: *The world was created five minutes ago*. It spoke for itself, and claimed that all memories and records had actually been created only five minutes ago. It was an impossible theory to deny, since any evidence against it would have been created five minutes ago artificially, and thus would not be valid.

Now, let’s lower the scale of that a bit, from the world to a city. Imagine every human in a city had memories of a fake history implanted in them, and fake buildings made to suit those memories, such that you had a *city made a few days ago*. Would that city be one with a grand history? Or would it be a city

with a fictional history? Subsequently, would the religion with a grand history be real, or fake?

For me, it was the latter, for sure. This pope... Tindalos, the commander of the mage corps, was fishy as all hell. He was definitely connected to Leona, somehow.

“...By the way, are there any black-haired, red-eyed nuns here?”

“Hmm... Oh, the one with the analysis skill Lord Tindalos arranged was a black-haired, red-eyed nun. She, too, was a Beddhist, I believe.”

See? Done and done. We’ve got the clues, and Leona’s almost guaranteed to be in this city. Ehhh... I’m starting to feel like this is a game of hide-and-seek or something. Bleh.

“Papa! I want a pair of these socks that warm up when you wear them before bed! Get one for big sis, too, please!”

“The store’s selling that kinda stuff, too?”

In any case, the socks did look pretty comfy and warm, so I bought enough to bring back to Rokuko and the others, too. By the time we were done, mass was just beginning.

The main chapel was filled with long pews, just like a normal church. We participated in the center, out of sight. A priest of Beddhism stood before a podium and began regaling a tale of Beddhism.

“In the past, a religion known as Ancient Beddhism was commonplace upon the land,” he began, repeating what we had just heard.

The idea was that the nun at the stand had grown up hearing these speeches, presumably. The priest ended by saying this: “And now is the time for the people of the world to embrace a Beddhism without a god. Let us acquire peace without relying on the whims of the divine.” Such was the end of mass.

They don’t count sheep here, huh? Like “one sheep over the fence” and everything... Oh, you do it once a week? Neat. That’s here, too. The recreation’s pretty high level... Hey, Soto, you’re drooling. {Purification}.

* * *

Anyway, the Tindalos guy was clearly the most suspicious here, so the best thing to do seemed to be to use our authority to set up a meeting. What was our authority, you asked? Well, the authority of the empire's imperial princess, of course.

Having finished our investigation and returned to the inn, we met up with everyone and discussed matters with Emmymephy.

"And that's how it is, Princess Mephy. Could you set up a meeting between us and the commander of this country's mage corps?" I asked.

"Mm, I'm afraid I can't."

"Wait, really? But you're the imperial princess."

"I, too, investigated Daide's branch of Beddhism at the First Empress's request, of course, but the man calling himself pope, Tindalos, avoided all of my requests for a meeting."

The question was, did Tindalos avoid them on purpose, or was Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} at work here? If Tindalos was Leona, or someone pretty close to Leona, it was probably safer to say the latter was at fault.

I glanced at Wataru, who was here as Mephy's guard.

"I mean, I know you're the real pope, Keima."

"Oh, nah, that's not it. I was just wondering if the meeting would happen if you sat it out, Wataru."

"Huh? Don't be crazy, I couldn't do that. Haku asked me personally to guard Princess Mephy. She'll need a guard then more than ever."

Yeaah, he'd have to take responsibility if anything happened to Emmymephy. Just how far would his {Ultra Good Fortune} go to protect him?

"I could just go on my own," I suggested.

"Not if the meeting is held for me to introduce you. Commanders are high enough in status it would be quite rude for me to not be there," Emmymephy replied. I would have thought she could just write a letter of introduction, but apparently things were more complicated. International politics were fully in play here.

“Maybe you should just go back to the empire, then?”

“I say, don’t be ridiculous. I’m here posing as an exchange student in their academy, I could not return just like that without warning.”

“I see.” Well, my suggestion was pretty reckless anyway, so no harm done.

That was when Rokuko interjected, patting Soto’s head while giving her a lap pillow. “So, Mephy. Does Tindalos have any relatives in this academy you’re attending?”

“Oooh, I say, what a sharp observation Rokuko! Now that you mention it, he does have a grandchild there. You could meet him if you pose as one of my guards and come with me to the academy!”

Rokuko nodded thoughtfully. “Do you think we could enter the academy, too?” she asked.

“Hm? I just said you could come as my guards.”

“No, I mean as students. Think about it. It wouldn’t be strange for you to have brought a bit of an entourage along with you, right? You are the imperial princess, after all.”

Rokuko’s idea was completely out there. Emmymephy paused to think it over.

“You do have a point, I say. Or rather, considering Rokuko is so high in status, maybe I would be part of the entourage? That is actually closer to the truth,” Emmymephy said. It was hard to tell whether she was joking or not. Rokuko was Haku’s little sister, so.

“Mamaaa, what about meee?” Soto cooed.

“Mm, right. You might as well use the opportunity to join us at school. It’s not every day you get this kind of opportunity. So, Mephy. Does the academy have a section for elementary schoolers?”

“It certainly does. But, who exactly is... Ah, never mind. She looks enough like you that I know she’s related to the First Empress, too,” Emmymephy said, with a bit of a distant look in her eyes. Her assumption was correct, in any case.

“Oh, and that’ll make you a student, too, Keima! Man, I can’t wait to see you wearing a school uniform.”

“What’re you talking about, Wataru? I’m Rokuko’s guard. Were you guarding Princess Mephy in a school uniform, huh?”

“I mean, yeah? Right, Princess Mephy?”

“Erm, no? You guarded me in the same thing you’re wearing now.”

Wataru and Rokuko sighed, their pitiful lies having been blown away.

“Mephy. You need to go with the flow and say he wore a school uniform,” Rokuko instructed.

“Right, Princess Mephy. Read the room a bit more.”

“Er, I say, am I in the wrong here?”

“Nah. These two are just being idiots. You gave the right answer, I assure you.”

I was one step away from being forced into wearing a school uniform. *Good grief, how many years has it even been since I last wore a school uniform?*

“That’ll make me Rokuko’s maid, then,” Ichika said. “Master’ll be free to investigate and stuff if I’m sticking with my girl Rokuko. Guess Niku can look after Soto?”

“That works for me,” Niku said. And so the two maids on the side had their places settled.

But still. Back to school, huh?

* * *

The Kingdom of Daide’s Royal Academy. Emmymephy was visiting as an exchange student in Daide’s singular school for noble children. It was one of those places where only the most extraordinary of commoners even had a chance of enrolling. There was a fairly expensive tuition fee to attend, but it was shaved down for us since we were Emmymephy’s associates and would only be attending for a bit. Oh, and I would charge Haku the costs later. Though I had to say, the power of political authority was truly something to behold. To think we would get enrolled the day after we sent our request.

We found ourselves in a classroom built like a stairway, just like lecture halls

in Earth colleges. Rokuko introduced herself in front of the blackboard.

“Hi, I’m Rokuko Tsia,” she said, borrowing the name of a noble house in the empire... or rather, the Tsia house. This was on Haku’s instructions. There was a lot of red tape to commoners enrolling, and it would have been far too unusual for a foreign commoner to enroll in the first place. If she called herself Laverio, everyone would know she was imperial royalty, and Labyrinthart wasn’t a name we wanted to say here. That said, Haku didn’t want her to go by Masuda or Goren, so Tsia was her compromise. Soto was probably introducing herself as Soto Tsia in the elementary school section with Niku as her bodyguard-cum-maid.

“Rokuko, I say, over here. The seat next to me is free,” Emmymephy called.

“Ah, Mephy. I think I’ll take you up on that offer.”

Rokuko sat down in the seat next to Emmymephy’s. A small stir ran through the classroom, as anyone on such friendly terms with the imperial princess was surely a big deal, even if only in the empire itself. Incidentally, I only learned this recently, but the Tsia house was a surprisingly big deal. They were as powerful as one would expect for a house capable of managing the entire Tsia region. Probably too powerful to just casually drop by the church of a small town, but meh. Also, the Pavella house was about equal in power.

Anyway, I didn’t need to introduce myself (since I was a guard), so I was just standing at the back of the classroom and watching it all unfold. *I’m just a guard. My job’s to watch over my lady and keep quiet.*

I nodded to the other guards and mingled. Wataru waved with a goofy grin, and I noticed some people flinching at that.

“Wataru, did you do something so terrifying that people would be scared of me just for being your friend?”

“Hahaha, nah. Some of them just asked me to train them, and I obliged.”

Apparently some of the guards here were bold enough to challenge a Hero. Or well, maybe some were just curious to see how strong he really was, when it came to pass that they fought alongside each other.

“By the way, do we not get chairs? My legs are gonna get tired.”

“There’s staff rooms for servants, but guards generally need to stand all day for work,” Wataru replied.

“Oh. Oh...”

And that’s where Ichika went already... I’m starting to regret infiltrating as a guard instead of as a student. Well, at least I can use Golem Assistance.

Anyway, it was time to see what they were taught here in the academy. The first lesson was math.

“Anyone can do this much, can’t they?” Rokuko asked.

“Those on our level, at least. I say, I would be the shame of the imperial family if this were beyond me.”

Yeah, it’s just basic arithmetic. Multiplication and division, huh? That’s about elementary-school level. Rokuko can handle it no problem, and so can Emmymephy. Seems like the Daide nobles aren’t slouching in their studies, either. They’re doing fine. Though... Not quite all of them, I see.

“Aha, only after doing guard duty did I realize just how much you stick out when you don’t study. Nobles study hard under tutors so they don’t show weakness in situations like this. It’ll just get exploited later, otherwise,” Wataru explained.

“Being a noble must be rough, huh?”

Wataru and I chatted quietly in the back of the room, where the students couldn’t hear. I was supposedly on guard duty, but it felt more like I was just sitting in on the class. There were other guards, and really, did one need guards in the middle of a class? Were they preparing for a terrorist attack or something? Well, I didn’t feel like one was coming. I wanted to sleep.

“They’re nobles, so they apparently need to get used to having guards with them at all times, no matter what they’re doing.”

“Again, nobles sure have it rough... Do you think they’d let me sleep if I said it was for religious reasons?”

“I don’t think anyone will stop you, but are you sure you want to do that?”

Sure. My actual objective here should really be to leave guarding Rokuko and

the others to Wataru, then go off searching for Tindalos's grandchild. At the very least, said grandchild doesn't seem to be their classmate. Ehh... I'll keep an eye out for a bit, then go search for them.

Not having anything else to do, I leaned against the back wall and locked my position into place with Golem Assistance. I'd be resting while entrusting my Wearable Golem with protecting my body.

Next period was a dance lesson. A natural part of a noble's curriculum, really.

"Please form groups of two, one girl and one boy in each," the instructor announced.

Egads! The anti-loner weapon, "form groups of two" has been unleashed! What will Rokuko do, when this is her first time attending the class?!

"What's the plan, Mephy?" Rokuko asked.

"Mm, I will pair with Wataru. An imperial princess cannot so lightly dance with just any man."

"My my. I'll pair with Keima, then. I don't want to dance with anyone else, so."

What in the... Guards count for this? Oh, it's for emergencies... Wait. Does this mean I have to take dance lessons, too? But I've never danced before.

As I faltered, feeling at a loss, Rokuko whispered into my ear. "Keima. You can just watch and learn at the start, no?"

"Oh, good point."

Indeed. We had our secret weapon: Golem Assistance. I could dance perfectly just by copying someone else's demonstration. However, it only worked with Rokuko and me in a team. The Golems wouldn't be able to react to any unexpected moves whatsoever.

And so, after observing the instructor perform the dance in a pair of their own, we likewise performed a perfect dance. So perfect it seemed we were being controlled by something else, even.

"I didn't know you and Rokuko could dance, Keima," Wataru said.

“We’re just copying what we see,” I replied. And by the way, both he and Emmymephy danced perfectly. Just what one would expect from a Hero and an imperial princess. Incidentally, Rokuko and I both had metal plates slid into our shoes, just in case we accidentally stepped on each other’s feet.

Practical magic lessons up next, huh? This is some real-deal fantasy-world stuff.

The class moved to the sports field. Rokuko and the other students changed into gym clothes... and when I saw the clothes, particularly the lower half, I was shaken to my core.



Bloomers? Why bloomers? They went extinct in Japan, but to think they found new life in a fantasy world... That said, these purple crotch-protecting garments might be completely unknown to children these days. I mean, maybe. Whew... Their thighs are sparkling.

“Hey, Wataru. Are those, uh... pants really acceptable? Feels like they’re showing a lot of leg here.”

“Oh, yeah. They’re bloomers. Apparently a Hero introduced them at some point, and they’re considered very proper and ladylike to wear for exercise.”

I’m starting to get the feeling anything’s okay as long as it comes from a Hero. But it doesn’t look like anyone’s embarrassed here. I guess it’s fine, then...

Also, I thought that the bloomers were Leona’s work, but apparently it was possible that some other hero had spread them.

Once everyone gathered together and the bell rang, class began.

“O Fire, become a sphere and smite my enemy—{Fireball}!” the instructor exclaimed, launching an example fireball that hit a target perfectly ten meters away. “Now, do the same, and likewise hit targets with magic. Ball-type spells won’t break the target, so go as hard as you want.”

Apparently this lesson was about controlling the power of one’s spells. It was true that learning how to cast a spell from a skill scroll was very different from being an expert at using the spell. Most magic involved launching ranged attacks, and the aiming of those attacks depended on one’s personal skill.

Even spells that went head-on, like my {Element Shot}, would miss if my aim was bad to begin with.

“The more mana you use, the more it grows. Using stronger spells is good for improving one’s mana capacity as well, so cast them to your heart’s content. You can use any mana potions you have with you.”

One could similarly improve their mana capacity by praying and doing visualization training while it was at full capacity. I seemed to recall Ichika mentioning something like that in the past.

Anyway, almost all the students depleted their mana reserves and ended up

exhausted. *Almost* all the students, because...

“Rokuko, I say, how are you still standing? You haven’t even drunk a potion yet...”

“Mm, I’ve barely even warmed up. Really, my throat’s more tired than anything.”

...Because, in a surprising twist, Rokuko remained standing no matter how many {Fireballs} she cast.

“Keima,” Wataru said. “When did Rokuko get so much mana?”

“Remember whose little sister she is and take a guess.”

“Ah. Right.”

To be honest, though, I had no idea, either. Was it possible she and I shared the same mana capacity, due to our soul bond? It was possible. Another theory was her capacity exploding due to her sleeping in the Divine Bedding every night. She prayed Beddhist style by sleeping, and was pretty much constantly at max mana due to the bedding. Everything was set up for her capacity to increase.

The truth of the matter was yet unclear, but either way, we knew that Rokuko could launch off {Fireballs} for a solid hour without running out of mana.

Incidentally, as for her control, at the start she was missing so bad she hit the target of the person next to her, but by the end she could land hits ten times in a row, which was enough to pass the lesson.

After exercise was history, which really made me question if they wanted to put their students to sleep. The only saving grace was that lunch came later, not before. Though I was already sleepy. Despite having just been watching.

“Aaah, and as for this section... Rokuko, could you read it aloud to the class?”

“Certainly. Denka Daide, the first king of Daide, devised a plot to earn independence from the three superpowers: the Laverio Empire, the Demon Realm, and the Holy Kingdom. The plot was the Tri-Country Armistice. The first king was known as the Sage of Arbitration, and...” Rokuko said, listing off Daide’s history without even looking at the textbook.

“...Incredible. You are well learned, I see. Everyone would do well to learn from your example,” the instructor said when she was done.

“I say, Rokuko, I’m impressed! I would expect nothing less from one of my retinue.”

“Oh, this is cake. I just had to memorize what I saw.”

“I-I had no idea you were such a genius...!”

Rokuko was bragging, but I alone had seen the trick she pulled. And that wasn’t an analogy. Indeed, she had used the camera function of the dungeon to record her textbook ahead of time and cheat by reading it aloud from a screen nobody else could see but her and me. *That’s dirty! You’re so dirty, Rokuko! And that’s why I can trust my back to you, partner.*

By the way, Rokuko’s streak of perfection didn’t last forever. It all came crashing down in etiquette class.

“Rokuko, how practiced are you with tea manners?” Emmymephy asked.

“Mm, I’m not sure. I’ve had tea parties with Haku and my friends, but I never really thought about manners before.”

One could say that manners were habits formed over a lifetime. It was pretty harsh for Rokuko, who had only ever had friendly tea parties with close relatives.

“That may be all fine and good normally, but you’re a high-ranking noble from Tsia, and you need the manners to match. I say, what about using this opportunity to learn a bit? When you get married to Keima... Well, he’s a baron right now, no? There’s no harm in learning manners now while you’re lower in rank.”

“You have a point. Teach me well, Mephy.”

“As a member of the imperial family, I’m not too familiar with lower-level manners myself. Even if I marry down, I will still be treated as a member of the imperial family... W-Well, this is why they have instructors!”

And so, Rokuko likewise began studying manners. Though apparently she had learned much from watching Haku’s graceful moments, and so aside from the

condescending sneers that leaked out unconsciously while imitating her, she didn't do half bad. She even earned extra points for memorizing the names of everyone introduced to her after just one go.

"Rokuko sure is smart," Wataru said. "I can't believe she can remember everyone's names just like that. I have to write everything down on a notepad if I want to keep all the names in order."

"Yeaaaah," I replied, glancing at my map. As expected, she had tagged everyone currently in the classroom. That certainly would let her check everyone's name without memorizing them. What a cheat skill. No need to worry about messing up names like that. One could say that dungeon functions were actually just Rokuko's innate power, and all she was doing here was using her skills to their limits, but... It was so dirty that it kind of crossed a line and became refreshing, somehow.

As an aside, Ichika participated in the tea party as a maid, and her service was sublime. Apparently she had experience working as a maid in a noble's mansion to pay off a debt. I was surprised she would be so motivated to hone her skills in something that didn't have to do with money or gambling.

Anyway, we made it to noon. We met up with Niku and Soto, who had been in the elementary section, and went to eat lunch.

"Papa, mama, school is so much fun! There's even a legendary tree and stuff!" Soto exclaimed energetically the second we saw her. Glad to see she was having a good time.

"A legendary tree, like, one where if you confess beneath it on graduation you'll be happy forever?"

"Uh-huh! You need to schedule a reservation for it!"

Their legendary tree has reservations...? I guess it makes sense, it'd be too crowded to confess otherwise.

"So, Kuro. How was Soto?" I asked.

"Very orderly. She took her praying seriously."

"She slept in class, then?"

“Yes.”

I see, she slept. That’s my daughter for you.

“Give back the ounce of respect I felt while eavesdropping from the side and thinking the prayer thing was serious,” Wataru said.

“Wataru. The real shameful thing here is forgetting that Beddhists pray by sleeping. Aren’t you a Beddhist, too?”

“I mean, technically, but...” Wataru scratched his head.

“It’s fine, I listened to the teacher while sleeping!”

“Indeed. There were no problems, even when the instructor called on her,” Niku added.

“Well, that’s... impressive?”

Let’s see here... She probably had Niku record the lesson as her Dungeon Master, then had her secretly tell her the answers using dungeon functions. Like mother, like daughter.

Lunch was served via a food ticket system. Everyone was used to it, given how those Daide people had been fine using it at our inn, too.

“Rokukooo, girl, I’ll bring your food to you. I’m your maid and all, so yeah. Whatcha want?”

“What do you recommend?”

“Mm, this fox udon! I just had some earlier, and lemme tell you, it was some hot stuff,” Ichika said. Apparently she had taken the time to eat her fill earlier, under the excuse that she needed to “make sure her master had the best meal possible.”

“Fox udon... So it’s made with little foxies?” Soto asked.

“No, it has fried stuff in it, like fried tofu or chicken,” Wataru replied. “It’s called fox udon since foxes love fried food. Wait... Do foxes in this world love fried food, too?” Wataru tilted his head.

“It’s probably a recipe Ishidaka spread, yeah? The udon in the Demon Realm came from him, too.”

“Aaah, right, Ishidaka the Hero, the God of Food. Good point.”

Almost all food coincidences can be traced back to Ishidaka. Wait... Does that mean the stands we saw when we first came here were from Ishidaka, not Leona? No, no, they would have been there a long time ago, and Ichika would have known about them. No doubt that it's Leona's work here, too.

Emmymephy secured a table with six seats for us, and we sat down. Ichika standing by the side as per her maid duties made it so only six of us needed to sit. Soto sat between Rokuko and I, while Wataru and Niku sat around Emmymephy on the other side. Wataru looked at me head-on and nodded. “Yep, she’s your daughter,” he said. Indeed.

“Chopsticks are tricky...” Soto said. She shakily lifted up her chopsticks to try to eat udon, only for the noodles to slip away every time.

“I know how you feel, Soto. I say, it took much time before I could use chopsticks myself,” Emmymephy said.

“It’s useful to learn how to use chopsticks. Since they’re just sticks, you can carry them around anywhere,” Wataru replied, while stabbing his fork into pasta with meat sauce.

But you’re not going to use them? Well, I suppose pasta is another thing entirely.

“You can just use a fork if you want, y’know,” I said.

“Nuh-uh! I’m gonna use chopsticks like you, papa!” Soto declared, grabbing udon with her chopsticks again, and shoving her face into them directly before they could slip out. She then slurped them up. How heartwarming.

“By the way, you and Rokuko already know how to use chopsticks, huh?” Wataru asked, probing deeper for the first time in a while.

“Sure. I mean, don’t a bunch of adventurers know how to use them? All Heroes throughout history have used them and stuff, so it’s not too uncommon, even if most people don’t know how to use them. Look, Niku’s using them, too.”

“Yes. I use them, too,” Niku said, deftly clinking her two chopsticks together

with one hand.

“Okay, good point... And it seems like most people in this school can use them.”

“Me too, dude,” Ichika called while nomming on a sandwich. She apparently learned how just so she could eat food made for chopsticks with chopsticks. She always showed an extra level of passion when food was involved.

We had shortcake as our after-meal dessert. Not even our inn offered cream with fresh fruits and creams except on special orders. They put a lot of effort into it, maybe due to this being a school for nobles.

“How much does each of these cost?” I asked.

“Somewhere in the silver range, for sure,” Rokuko replied.

“Mwahaha, but today is my treat! I say, eat to your heart’s content!” Emmymephy exclaimed.

“Yees! Long live Princess Mephy! I love ya, Princess Mephy! A princess among princesses!” Ichika declared.

“Yes, yes, shower me with your praise!” Emmymephy puffed out her flat chest with pride at Ichika’s praise.

“I wanna eat a whole cake, not just a slice!”

“Agreed, Soto.”

Soto and Niku were nomming away at their cake with incredible speed. Soto could use her {Teensy Reproduction} to eat more of it whenever she wanted now.

Come to think of it, does the reproduced food she eats disappear from her stomach an hour later? If so, that might be good for a diet. Though it would mean the food wouldn’t be good for emergency rations.

“Still, I didn’t expect you to be such a good student, Rokuko. I was surprised all morning in class,” Wataru said.

“I’m not the owner of a whole inn for nothing,” Rokuko replied, sounding a bit proud. Not that she should have been proud, since she basically just used her

dungeon functions to cheat everything except the math and magic lessons.

“You do know that will just make you stand out, yes?” Emmymephy asked.

“That’s the plan. The better of a student I am, the easier it will be to meet the commander’s grandson or whoever, right? Also, it’ll be good for gathering rumors, too.”

“True. If you’re going to stand out, better to be competent and liked than incompetent and disliked,” Wataru commented.

“If this has Wataru’s seal of approval, it must be the right call. Don’t you think so, Keima? Eheheh.”

“Yeah, but can’t we just look up his details and go talk to him directly?”

“Maybe they would tell us what class he’s in if we go to the staff room?”

I had Ichika investigate that afterwards, but long story short, the staff had already been instructed not to tell students what they knew about pretty much anything. Apparently, one part of the noble training for students here was learning to gather and manipulate information. They had to find ways to meet important people themselves without relying on the teachers.

Thus, we continued our school life while starting a search for Tindalos’s grandson. There were twists and turns, but we spent several days having our fill of a cozy school life.

Rokuko easily secured her position as an honor student, and ended up popular with boys and girls everywhere. I watched over her from behind at times, entrusted her to Ichika and Wataru at others, while searching the school (claiming that I was canvassing the area to better defend my liege when questioned) at other times, and even took naps in a place behind the school that got a nice amount of sunlight.

Wow, people sure do like to come to the backside of the school. I’ve seen girls fighting, boys confessing, couples forming, and even magic tools exploding in experiments. Ah, youth.

Unfortunately, Tindalos’s grandchild evaded me entirely. It was bizarre. There was some invisible force blatantly ensuring that we didn’t meet. My suspicion

was on Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune}.

And so, after yet another peaceful day, Rokuko came into my room while I was lazing about.

"Keima, do you have a second?"

"Sure. Did you figure something out?"

"Nooope. But I've heard some funny rumors, like about the seven mysteries of the school."

A school having seven local mysteries was a pretty common thing. Very school-like. I was sure our town had its own set of mysteries at this point. Maybe it was fate for that kind of folklore to develop in places.

"What kind of mysteries? A ghost in the bathroom, perhaps?"

"Oh, you know about her? Uh-huh, it's Hanako of the bathroom."

"Wait, her name's literally Hanako?" *Okay, instantly I understand that Leona is behind this. Because, I mean, Hanako of the bathroom is literally a Japanese urban legend.*

"What else?"

"Umm, let's see. The singing minstrel one hears at midnight, the forbidden hall, the dancing skeleton specimen, the stairs that grow more steps at night, the talking portrait of the first king, the time-traveling mirror... People were talking about there possibly being a new one soon, about disappearing socks."

"Yeah, those are some standard mysteries, even down to an eighth mystery on the verge of being added."

Given that they even had a legendary tree, it might be safe to say that Leona was behind all of them as well. As that thought crossed my mind, I noticed Rokuko rubbing her legs together anxiously.

"Hm? Gotta use the bathroom?"

"No! Um... Keima. Since we have school off tomorrow, do you want to go on a date?"

"A date? A date, huh... Like you and I going out alone together?"

“Right, a date. Let’s go somewhere, just you and me. I’ve talked to people in class, and it turns out there’s tons of date spots around that’ll bless a couple with happiness if they visit them!”

An invitation from Rokuko was pretty appealing, but... it would be hard to just relax and have fun when Daide was so dangerous, and while nothing notable had happened yet outside of the bizarre detours Wataru made on the first day, the fact that the situation might change at any moment kept us tense.

“I’m a bit hesitant to do that in this situation. Especially with Soto and everyone with us.”

“Grr, I guess you’re right...”

Though, for sure, I would have loved to go on a date if things were a bit more safe.

And so, I refused Rokuko’s invitation.

* * *

“You know, Rokuko, Keima. There’s a class called dungeon drills,” Emmymephy said, after I gave up on meeting Tindalos’s grandchild once again and moved to eat lunch in the cafeteria.

“Dungeon drills?”

“Quite.”

Apparently the school had dungeon drills as well. It was dungeon-delving practice meant to give one experience with entering dungeons and fighting. It would be useful to students by training their bodies and minds, or whatever.

“So this country has dungeons, too, hm?” Rokuko observed.

“I say, there is one within the school! Have you heard of the forbidden hall? I hear that room is a dungeon.”

“Where is it?” Rokuko asked. Emmymephy gestured vaguely toward the center of the building. “Ah... Did they make the school around the dungeon? Or the whole country, maybe?”

“Indeed. It’s been here since the founding of the school, or rather, since the

founding of the country.”

“What kind of dungeon is it?” Rokuko asked.

“I don’t know the details myself, but apparently all sorts of monsters appear within,” Emmymephy replied. Apparently it was a multicultural dungeon with Slimes, Goblins, Kobolds, Wolves, Giants Bats, and more crawling about. It was the perfect place for getting experience in class. It wasn’t a secret, either; even exchange students like us were free to know about it.

Guess with it being such an ancient dungeon, Leona won’t have much to do with it... Though it’s possible it serves Leona or something.

“I want to try dungeon drills, too, Mephy!” Soto exclaimed, shooting her hand up.

“Excellent, because in truth these drills will be held jointly between the elementary and advanced sections of the academy. We will be accompanying you all and teaching you as we go.”

“Isn’t that predicated on us having visited the dungeon before?” Rokuko asked.

“We haven’t had the drills before since we’re exchange students, but students in the elementary and intermediate sections have had them. And we’re allowed to bring our guards with us as a security measure,” Emmymephy replied. The idea was for the elementary students to be guarded by the advanced students, while the intermediate students went in on their own.

But wait, that would definitely mean the dungeon is pretty old. At least two or three years old. Though I guess if they faked memories for Beddhism, it’s possible they faked history for the dungeon, too.

“What will I do?” Niku asked.

“Elementary students can bring guards, too, so you’ll be coming with us, Kuro.”

That was convenient. Maybe Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} was helping out? Also, Tindalos’s grandchild was apparently an intermediate student, and in dungeon drills we had to keep our distance from them. At this point it seemed

faster to just give up and petition Tindalos directly, but that probably wouldn't help, either. *Gah, this is frustrating. Like being surrounded by soft, annoying walls.*

"Do you have a second?" came a voice. A boy that seemed to be about as old as an elementary schooler was speaking to us. He seemed like he would be pretty good-looking when he grew up.

Emmymephy put on a smile, facing him and his entourage. "Oh my, Prince Jedha. What brings you here?"

"Princess Mephy, how do you do? I am simply here to talk with this oh-so-rumored exchange student."

"I say, I do not recall allowing you to address me by that nickname, Prince Jedha."

"My apologies, Princess Emmymephy."

Apparently this silver-haired boy was the second prince that had proposed an engagement with Emmymephy. He looked at Soto and moved to continue. *Wait, by rumored exchange student, he means her? Not Rokuko?*

"I am Jedha Daide, the second prince of Daide. And you are Soto Tsia, of the Tsia noble house?"

"Yes? Nmmnm... What of it?"

C'mon, Soto. At least stop shoving your face full of cake when someone's talking to you.

"Ahaha, not faltering in the least in my presence, hm? Interesting. I would expect nothing less of one of Princess Emmymephy's friends. Ah, I see... This must be how my foolish older brother feels about that Summer girl."

"Prince."

"Yes, I know. I won't waver even if she comes to seduce me."

He was playing a little comedy show with his retinue like we weren't even here, and I had no idea how to react. Maybe he wanted us to toss a few coins into his upturned hat? Though since I was working as a guard, the right move here was for me to say nothing.

“So, whaddaya want?” Soto asked.

“Ah, yes, Lady Soto. I was wondering if I might be able to scout you into the Public Morals Committee.”

“The Public Morals Committee?” Soto asked.

“In the past, this school was run by the student council... the first prince, but now the Public Morals Committee has taken up their responsibility. I would like some skilled helpers... and I am in search of skilled vassals to aid my political goals. I have chosen you as one such possible vassal.”

“I see, I am pretty smart! Nobody can beat my taste in socks!” Soto puffed out her chest with pride. “But no. I’m a Beddhist, so I don’t take on any unnecessary work.”

“I-Is that so? No helping that, then. How about you and I form a party for the dungeon drills, then?” asked the second prince, leading right into a separate request. Was this perhaps the ancient negotiating technique of requesting two things in a row to make it harder for the person to reject both of them? In which case, this would be what he actually came here for.

“That would be fine, yes? You have to form a party with someone, after all.”

“Mm, I was planning to pair up with Mephy and the others, though.”

“Fear not. Elementary students can form pairs regardless of the advanced students with them.”

It seemed that both the advanced and elementary students needed to form parties of four, with the resulting group being eight people plus bodyguards; a fairly sizable group. But the imperial princess couldn’t form parties with just anyone, so it actually made sense for her to pair with the second prince.

“In that case, I’ll form a party with you on one condition.”

“A condition? And what would that be?”

“Give me all of your classmates’ socks as payment.”

“Er. S-Socks?” The second prince blinked in surprise. “All of them would be a bit much... There’s faction politics to consider, for instance.”

“Aw, really? Then I’ll take socks from each of the maids that work in the castle. Those will be easy to get on your orders, right?”

“Er, I suppose?”

“Negotiations complete! Please and thank you. Oh, and make sure they’ve actually worn them!”

Soto mimicked the negotiation technique that had just been used on her. And it actually worked. *Are you sure about this, prince?*

“Erm... And the other two can be those twins you’re often seen with, I suppose?”

“Uh-huh. That works!”

Those twins, huh? Apparently they were Soto’s classmates. They were two identical twins most people couldn’t tell apart, but Soto could easily, which made them like her.

“I shall see you when the time comes, then,” the prince said, then left.

Wait... But he said advanced students need four people, too, right? What’ll we do about the two others?

“Hey, Princess Emmymephy. Got any ideas for the other two in our own party?”

“I-I’ll manage somehow! I’m the imperial princess, I say!”

At the time, I had no idea what was about to happen... Or at least, I should have thought something ominous like that.

Soon came May 13th, the day of the dungeon drills. We would be meeting our other two members at the sports field.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I am Koreha Nyarlathotep, daughter of Crawling, the duke of the Nyarlathotep house.”

“N-Nice to meet you! I’m Summer Yog-Sothoth! Oh, I’m the daughter of Baron Yog-Sothoth.”

The gray-haired Lady Koreha and pink-haired Lady Summer introduced themselves. The two of them were subjects of extraordinary attention here,

largely due to their romantic relationships with the first prince.

Prince Harkes, the first prince of Daide. He was previously engaged to Koreha, but the engagement was canceled before he entered the academy. He then fell in love with Summer at first sight after beginning to attend there. There wasn't any conflict between the two of them, but everyone seemed to think of them as enemies, since the student council showed clear favoritism for Summer, while others whispered in the shadows that Koreha was clearly the superior choice for the prince to marry, on top of Summer being unfit to be queen due to her commoner origins.

"Uh, Princess Mephy? Why did you pick the two girls with the most baggage in the entire school?"

"I-I chose Koreha-chan having little choice due to my status as the imperial princess, and she recommended Summer-chan to join us...!"

And that wasn't the only problem. Koreha was glancing at Wataru and me, especially at our hair and faces, while muttering, "They're Japanese, aren't they...?" to herself. Summer, meanwhile, was looking straight at me and striking a victory pose while shouting, "I've finally found him!" That wasn't good.

"I say, Koreha is the investor behind the cafeteria and restaurant that are the talk of the town. They were impressive even to me. If they were in the imperial capital, I might find myself visiting them with regularity," Emmymephy said.

"Oh, those stores?" Wataru chimed in. "I went with her, and they were definitely pretty good."

"I am glad that they suited your fine imperial tastes," Koreha said with a laugh, having composed herself. She then greeted Wataru. "I thank you for your service, noble guards."

"Certainly. You may trust your safety to us, my lady," Wataru said, returning Koreha's greeting with a polite smile.

...Wait, did Wataru not hear her muttering? Maybe his {Ultra Good Fortune} blocked him from hearing it. Let me check.

"Hey, Wataru. She was just saying something about Japanese people."

“What about it?”

“What do you mean, what about it? Aren’t you searching for Japanese people? I just look like one, but maybe she was Japanese in a past life or something,” I said. I thought he’d care more about it, since he kept probing me for hints about me being Japanese.

“Oh, did I not mention it? I’m looking for a way to get back to Japan. Not for myself, but for one of my juniors, who does want to go back.”

“Hm? I guess you might have, maybe?”

“This person... Well, I don’t really sense they have anything to do with Japan, so I don’t care.”

You don’t... SENSE it, huh...? I mean, I guess that kind of gut instinct is important for Wataru, since he has {Ultra Good Fortune}. Sure.

Koreha and Summer both looked like they wanted to tell us something, but they couldn’t interject while Wataru and I were talking to each other. Perfect. Hopefully they would continue to not interject. I got the feeling that nothing they said would be good for us.

Immediately after all that, class started, and we met up with Soto and the others.

“Papa!” Soto exclaimed, rushing this way while waving. I caught her in a hug and patted her head. Niku bowed, keeping a bit of distance between us as most maids would. The second prince and a pair of twin boys were following behind us.

And that was when Summer finally spoke to me. “U-Um! Does her calling you papa mean, um, that you are her father?” she asked, looking at me and at Soto, who was nuzzling against me.

“Hm? I mean, yeah.”

“No way... Um, so, the mother is...”

“Mm.” I glanced Rokuko’s way, not saying more than I had to. Summer followed my gaze and paled.

“Wh-What a twiiiist...!”

How is that a twist? I'm so lost here.

“What, you’re Lady Soto’s father?!” “Greetings, please give your daughter to us!” The twin boys stepped forward and spoke simultaneously, despite not having introduced themselves.

“We’re,” “Meter,” “and Lacie,” “the sons of Count Dagon!”

Okay, this is annoying. Are they incapable of not talking at the same time, or taking turns speaking?

“Mm? Wait, if you’re Lady Soto’s father, doesn’t that make you the head of the Tsia house, Bonodore Tsia?!” the second prince exclaimed. Now that he mentioned it, that logic was perfectly sound, considering Soto was going by the Tsia name.

As I pondered what excuse to use, Emmymephy butted in. “Not quite, second prince. Soto’s not related to Duke Tsia by blood; I say, this is her real father. You’ve seen how skilled Rokuko and Soto are.”

“...Ahhh, she’s adopted. Understandable.”

Nice follow, Emmymephy. You didn’t even confirm that she was adopted, either, since that’d be a lie. Is this the political power of the imperial nobility? I take back everything I’ve ever said about you! You’re not just an idol otaku after all!

Anyway, to summarize, since the twins talked in a very annoying and confusing way, they looked so similar that even their parents sometimes didn’t recognize them. They’d picked up a habit of swapping places for fun, but in a surprising twist Soto was capable of easily distinguishing between the two of them. They interpreted that as a sign of true love, and thus wanted her as a wife.

“...Nah, that’s stupid. Would you ask me to marry you if I could distinguish both of you no problem?”

“That would,” “never,” “ever happen!”

“Don’t believe me, huh? So you’re Meter and you’re Lacie, right? I’ll turn around, so swap places as much as you like,” I said, taunting them. And

naturally, I distinguished them without any issue. By tagging them with the dungeon functions, of course! Niku and I could use them just as well as Rokuko and Soto, since we were Dungeon Masters.

“So, what was all that about love, you tantrum-throwing children?”

“A-Amazing...” “How did he do that...?”

“Got it? There’s nothing special about what Soto did. Hell, even Wataru could tell you apart. Right?”

“Wha? M-Me?”

“Say what?!” “Just try it!”

The twins ran off to Wataru, leaving me alone. At least they were full of energy.

Shenanigans aside, we all finished introducing ourselves and headed to the dungeon. There was a courtyard in the center of the academy by the dungeon’s entrance, and while it was open now, there were gates that indicated it was usually closed off.

The second prince and the twins stood at the front, while the girls took position in the middle. We bodyguards held up the rear. At first I was uncertain about the elementary kids taking the front, but thinking about it the entire point of this exercise was getting experience for the elementary students. This formation had been selected by Lady Koreha, and we bodyguards would only step in when things got dangerous.

Then, once we were a little further back than bodyguards really should be, Wataru came whispering to me. “So, Keima. How’d you distinguish the twins? I just randomly guessed and got it right each time, but...”

“I figured you would. Well, not to spill the beans, but I just tagged them in a way they didn’t notice. Simple, right? Soto’s probably doing the same thing.”

“What in the? Good as ever at pulling tricks, I see. Like daughter, like father...”

The trick to deceiving Wataru was to never lie in any capacity. Works every time.

Once we entered the dungeon, we did pretty much standard guard work. We

were there for emergencies only, and since things were going fine we basically just watched. Or rather, us getting involved subtracted points from their score, so it was a last resort.

“O spear of light, pierce mine enemies— {Lightning!}”

Lady Koreha pierced a disfigured Slime’s core right through. Her control over magic was superb. It was the kind of skill one couldn’t get straight from a scroll.

“Thanks,” the second prince said. “Swords don’t do much against slimes. Your skill with magic is clear to see, Lady Koreha; is this the boon of receiving a queen’s education? My brother’s foolish actions are more painful to consider by the day.”

“Your praise honors me,” Koreha replied, bowing her head.

“Could you leave the next Slime to me? This is class, so let me do stuff, too.”

“Certainly, Rokuko.”

“I say, you are both so reliable. Isn’t that right, Soto-chan?” Emmymephy asked.

“Uh-huh! I’m starting to think we’re invincible!”

Those in the middle were having a peaceful chat... only for Lady Summer to stealthily fall back from the group. She was gesturing our way, apparently wanting to discuss something secret with us.

“Um, Keima, was it?” she said.

“Hm? Is something the matter?” I asked.

“Do the phrases ‘heroine’ or ‘character with a route’ mean anything to you?” she asked abruptly.

“Uhhh... What, is this about a play or something?”

“Erm... My apologies, think nothing of it. More importantly, you are ever so heroic, Keima! When I saw you a moment ago, I almost fell in love at first sight!”

When she said ‘heroine,’ did she mean the heroine of a story? Hmm. The daughter of a baron, and a former commoner. Pink hair. And having a route? Hmm. Oh yeah, it’s all coming together. Think I have a good idea of what

Leona's planning now. This is just a guess, but...

...Leona's trying to use this entire country to make a "story."

I guess it's like a reality show? She prepares the participants and environments, then lets everyone go wild. Nobody can predict how the story will develop from the start. It's a genre that sells on completely unscripted tragedy and drama born from real-life interactions. Many of them involve romance.

If one were to think of this entire country through that lens, then the one could consider Beddhism, the weird stands, and the Japanese-style stuff as the "setting." And with the stage set, she had prepared a heroine... or a protagonist, maybe? This baron's daughter, Summer, had probably been chosen for that. She may have looked plain on the surface, but she actually had the face of a movie star, and her pink-blond hair was as traditional as you could get. She was the quintessential heroine anyone would love. And indeed, the student council and first prince had completely fallen for her.

But why did she start talking about 'heroines' to me? She seems a bit too careless and inexperienced to be one of Leona's people... I have no idea what Summer's goals are. Guess I'll be a bit on guard with her. There's no such thing as being too on guard when it comes to Leona... Or, well, maybe there is. Can never be sure with her.

"Would it please you to accept my offer of friendship? If I understand the situation, your wife and child have been taken by Archduke Tsia, leaving you free at the moment. I believe I would be able to provide you comfort in these trying times. If you would tell me the inn you are staying at, I may come visit you at a later da—"

"Please return to the formation. I am but a humble guard," I said. *Okay, I'm starting to think she's less a spy from Leona and more a honey trap sent by Haku. Either way, sweet heroine, I'm turning you down.*

I shooed Summer away.

From there, we finished the dungeon drills with not much happening, aside from the second prince striving to fight the most out of anybody. Summer kept looking my way longingly even after I shooed her away, but she settled with just watching me from afar, and obediently didn't try to talk to me again.

Oh, and I did try to stealthily communicate with the dungeon's Dungeon Master, but didn't get a response. Though it was possible that he just hadn't noticed me since there were other invaders.

Anyway, with Leona's plans now a bit more clear, we regrouped to discuss our future plans. We all gathered back at the inn.

"First of all, regarding Tindalos. I feel like we can't meet him because Wataru's with us," I began.

"Me?"

"Yeah. It's clearly bizarre that we haven't been able to meet him after two entire weeks."

There had to be some force at work here, and the most obvious candidate was Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} keeping us apart. After all, we had been called here since Haku was suspicious of that possibility to begin with.

"I see..."

"So, if we're going to keep investigating Tindalos, I think we should do it completely separate from Wataru, not share information, and never mention Wataru or Princess Mephy's names during the investigation. That should probably lead to us meeting him. Whaddaya think?" I concluded.

"...You may have a point. But what should I do, then?" Wataru asked.

"Keep guarding Princess Mephy. Oh, and that means you shouldn't do anything either, Princess Mephy."

"I say, I'm the imperial princess and you're ordering me to do nothing... I'm the imperial princess..."

In my opinion, it seemed pretty logical for an imperial princess to be guarding the back rather than attacking from the front.

"Also, it's a bit late for this, but I say, we need to hurry! At this rate, I will be wed to the second prince, and the only wedding I need is one with Ichigo!"

Emmymephy was quite insistent on Ichigo being her wife... The delusions of idol otaku were truly something else. I was starting to think I should have recommended her to be Mikan's Dungeon Master instead.

“So you say, but I can’t think of anything else for you to do. Any ideas?”

“Grrr... Ah, I know! I must attend a night party next week and greet the king of Daide. That will make it possible to meet Tindalos himself, no? I say, this is something you could only ever do with the help of the imperial princess!”

The phrase “night party” caught Rokuko’s attention.

“Oh, a party? That sounds fun. I’ve been wanting to attend one of those! Especially since I bothered to learn etiquette in class.”

“The First Empress expected that and sent a dress for you alongside a message. There’s one for Soto as well. I say, the First Empress never fails to impress!”

“Wait, really?!” Soto exclaimed, equally excited. I had to wonder when Haku had made the dresses, and when she’d measured them for their sizes.

“Papa, mama, let’s go to the party! It’s a party!”

“Hmmm...”

It would probably be perfectly safe if we attended with Wataru. If we could attend without his {Ultra Good Fortune} cockblocking us, that is.

“We’ll have the party be a branching point where we search for Tindalos on our own afterwards. How about that?”

“That works for me. We’ll keep going as we have been until then,” Wataru said.

“I say, sounds like a plan.”

“Okay, Keima. So, what do we do until then? Keep going to school?” Rokuko asked.

“Yeah. Sounds good to me.”

In which case, it would be best to start investigating the oh-so-suspicious Summer on my own after the party. Who knew what Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} would pull. Wouldn’t be strange if it cut us off from any clues, just like how it was blocking us from even meeting Tindalos’s grandchild?

Without any progress in our investigation, we reached the day of the party—May 31st. Information on Tindalos was shockingly sparse, which left no doubt that Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} was really breaking its back here. It was getting to the point that we couldn't even meet Summer anymore.

"This is pretty intense... Is it because I'm going solo starting tomorrow?" I asked.

"There's no denying it at this point. I guess I'll back out as promised," Wataru said with a shrug, having never expected his {Ultra Good Fortune} to interfere with the investigation so much. Yeah, with it going into overdrive this hard, anything I tried to investigate would probably disappear instantly. We had been using Wataru as a safe zone, but honestly he was getting kind of terrifying.

"Finished dressing Rokuko up, my duuuudes. Soto's up neeext," Ichika called.

"Okaaay! Thanks, big sis Ichika!" Soto called, rushing over. Ichika was putting the dresses from Haku onto them. I really had to kneel in awe at how skilled Ichika was in all walks of life.

As Soto left, Rokuko walked in, as if changing places with her.

"So, Keima? What do you think? Does it suit me?" she asked. It was a dark-blue dress that left her shoulders exposed. There were few frills, and while the skirt was fairly long, it was still a slender dress that showed off her curves. She had on gloves and Knee Socks Golems for dancing, so she would have no problems there. She also had bracelets on her arms. They were the Lionheart Bracelets for defending against charms, but they still suited her. As one would expect from something made by the God of Darkness.

"Yeah, it looks perfect on you."

"Could you try to be a bit more emotional when praising me?" Rokuko asked, shaking her head.

"It brings out your intellectual side. Just what Haku would choose, I guess?"

"Hmph, right, that's better. And proper clothes suit you surprisingly well, too, Keima."

It didn't really matter, but I was wearing a fancy tuxedo suit myself.

“You look sharper than usual, and, how do I put this... Pretty fast!”

Fast...? Seemed like Rokuko was as bad at giving compliments as I was.

Next came out Soto, wearing a black-and-white dress with a poofy skirt. She had a different, fluffy skirt underneath the poofy one. It was called a panier, I think? It was what pianists wore at recitals, or at least, cliché ones.

“Papa! How is it?! Cute, right?!”

“Yeah, it looks perfect on you.”

“Keima, you literally just said the same thing to me.”

What can I say? Don't expect me to have an expansive vocabulary for praising girls' outfits.

“Err, you look like you'll be popular in that!”

“I'll be popular?! Yay!”

Okay, good. Soto being happy means mission accomplished to me.

“Master. The carriage is here,” Niku said, bowing her head and wearing a maid outfit. She and Ichika would be participating as our servants.

“Now! I say, off to the castle we go!” Emmymephy declared.

“Let's go, everyone!” Wataru shouted in turn. Emmymephy was wearing a frilly outfit, while Wataru was in his usual Hero gear. Since Wataru was a Hero, his formal wear was his usual adventurer gear, in contrast to most people. For a second I wondered if I could have done the same, since I was a so-called adventurer noble myself, but apparently the low rank of baron wasn't quite enough for that to pass.

“Also, bit late to be asking, but where're your maids, Princess Mephy?”

“I can put on a dress myself! I say, any member of the imperial family should be able to get dressed without assistance!” she declared. Apparently her dress was specially made for her to be able to put it on herself. As a side note, she had brought maids with her to the country at the start, but they had all vanished at some point. Ah, they went to investigate places Wataru had avoided, I see...

“Well, it happens often, I say. I’m quite used to it, thanks to the First Empresses’ prophecies and all that.”

“I admire how you can take this in stride.”

We lived in a world where human life did not hold much weight. But either way, we got in the carriage and headed to the castle.

Despite having to take detours due to accidents on our way to the castle, we arrived safely and on time. We didn’t bother thinking about what would have happened had we not taken the detours, since what was done was done.

After passing through the entrance, we found ourselves in a party hall with a sparkling chandelier. There was catering for food and open spaces for dancing. The stairway with ornately carved guardrails led up to second-floor seating. Emmymephy guided us to said seating. Apparently it was for VIPs.

After making it to the top, we found the king in his formal wear lounging atop a fancy sofa with red cloth covering it. He looked around forty, which was young for a king.

“Oooh, Princess Mephy. You have done well to come tonight,” the king said.

“I thank you ever so much for inviting me on this fine night, your highness,” Emmymephy replied with a honed courtesy. Her manners as an imperial princess were perfect. The king, meanwhile, lifted his palm in a half salute directed her way. That was probably what the royals of Daide did instead of bowing their heads.

“So, how was Jedha? I am told you took dungeon drills with him yesterday.”

“He was adorable, and I find much like a *little brother* now,” Emmymephy said, emphasizing that he was just a brother and nothing more. Apparently it was important for her to continually re-emphasize that she had no plans on marrying him.

“I see. Well, please do enjoy yourself today. There will be space for you to rest here, and you may come again whenever you like.”

“I say, I am most gracious. Incidentally, a series of circumstances have left me unable to greet Lord Tindalos, the captain of the mage corps, but I pray that

today will finally be the day we meet. Where might he be?”

“He is not here. There was some important ritual for him to attend, or something of the like.”

Another miss. Unsurprising.

“Can I greet his family, at the very least...?”

“Erk. My apologies. Not even I can speak directly against the Tindalos house...”

How does that even make sense...? Oh, the king doesn't have much authority since he only recently became king after an assassination destroyed faith in the royal family? Meanwhile the Tindalos house is extremely powerful right now because the head of house doubles as the pope of a major religion and the commander of the mage corps? He has more power and authority than the literal king? Okay, guess we don't get to meet him today.

We decided to switch gears and just enjoy the party.

We danced to the orchestra, ate the catering, and... Okay, that was actually all there was to do. After all, I had nothing to do with the socializing; I was just kind of hanging around Emmymephy... That was the plan, anyway, but Koreha and Summer from the dungeon drills were here. I didn't see the twins or the second prince anywhere, though.

“Good evening, Princess Mephy, Lady Rokuko, and Lady Soto.”

“Good evening, Lady Koreha, Lady Summer. I see you are here together,” Princess Mephy replied. The two of them were, indeed, joined at the hip.

“Indeed. After all, this is a party celebrating the return of my former betrothed... the first prince and his retinue, the student council. They're your lovers, aren't they, Lady Summer?”

“Lady Koreha, please do not phrase it that way. We are all just friends. I have only one true love,” she said, attempting to look my way, but since Rokuko and Soto were beside me, she ended up shifting her gaze back awkwardly. “Aaah, my true love is here, but I haven't been able to meet him at all... Such a shame...”

I heard that. Why the heck are you calling me your 'true love'?

From there, Summer took deep breaths, clenched her fists with resolve, then came walking over to speak to me directly.

"Excuse me! Can we talk alone for a moment?" she asked.

"No. I couldn't leave my partner's side to speak alone with another woman."

"Um. Ummm... In that case, Lady Rokuko can come with us," she said. Apparently Summer wanted to talk to me no matter what. I looked at Rokuko.

"That's fine with me," she said.

"...Alright, then. Wataru, could you look after Soto for me?"

"Absolutely. You can count on me."

With Rokuko's permission, I left Soto in a safe place (beside Wataru) and went with Summer to the balcony. There was a cold wind blowing, and nobody else was there. The perfect place for a secret discussion.

"So, what is it you wanted to talk about, Lady Summer?" I asked.

"Errrm... Um, Lady Rokuko, could I ask you to step away for a moment?" Summer asked, smiling at Rokuko.

"Uh, no? Why do you think I came with you?"

"Ngh! I-Is there any way I can convince you?!"

"No?"

"P-Please? Just this once?"

"Again, no. Keima's my partner."

The flat rejections were making Summer get teary-eyed. She abandoned her attack on Rokuko and shifted my way.

"I would like to talk to you alone. Could you ask her to leave as well, Keima?"

Summer's eyes have been shining red for a while now. And...

"My Master! Do you remember I exist? I'm providing you protection right now, don't worry!"

Kosaki, the ring Succubus I was wearing beneath my glove, was speaking to me. *Thanks, Kosaki. I knew wearing you at all times just in case something like this happened was the right idea.*

“Lady Summer. Just to be clear, {Charm} doesn’t work on us, alright?”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Whatever might you be talking about?! I-I wasn’t, goodness!”

Pink hair, red eyes. Now that I thought about it, I knew quite a few girls who looked like this back in Goren.

I grabbed Summer’s shoulders and held her in place. “You’re a Succubus, aren’t you?”

“Ngh!” She visibly flinched. “N-Not at all. Why, that’s the cruelest thing anyone has ever said to me!”

“Yeah, yeah, you made your bed when you tried to {Charm} us. We might’ve been in danger if we didn’t have anti-charm equipment on us, y’know. Too bad. But anyway... What’re you planning?”

“A-Anti-charm...? Ngh... Y-You’ve left me no choice!”

Summer shook me off and jumped back, putting distance between us. And then, she...

“Please! Please talk to me, I’m begging you!”

...She started shamelessly groveling before me!

“Hm...? Wait, Lady Summer. Have you and I met somewhere before?” Rokuko asked.

“W-We did the dungeon drills together...?”

“Mm, I feel like I recognize you somehow, but whatever. Go ahead and say what you want to say. We’ll hear you out. Right, Keima?”

“Yeah, sure. Get up already. This may be the balcony, but people will notice if a noble lady keeps genuflecting.” I held out a hand and helped Summer up.

“Y-You’ll listen to what I have to say?”

“Yeah. Just spit it out already.”

We came here to listen to her in the first place. But to think she was a Succubus. It was hard not to think about that one evil god when Succubi were involved. Did Leona throw Summer at us out of pity because our investigation wasn't making any progress? Curses.

"Erm, for starters, could I ask how you came to this country, and how you have been spending your time here? In as much detail as possible."

"Why do you want to know about me?"

"It's important," Summer said, her eyes serious.

Ehhh, I don't really want to tell her that. I guess I'll just use this opportunity to dangle Haku's involvement as bait.

"We came to this country to investigate why Princess Mephy was proposed to."

"Princess Emmymephy's engagement... I see, that's the flag! Ah, excuse me, please continue."

"I can't give the details here, but... Let's just say the Beddhist Church is involved."

"Beddhism... I see, it's all coming together," Summer said, nodding to herself about something.

"Don't just nod, explain yourself to us. First of all, do you serve the God of Chaos?"

"Um, ah, wha? Why are you mentioning *her*?"

"Her," huh? Interesting.

"I see. How about you tell us what you know?"

"Sorry, I don't have time for that right now. But... I will have time tomorrow. I'm willing to tell you everything I know tomorrow, even. Could you hold on until then?"

Hm.

"Sure, if you swear it with Contract magic."

"No problem. We can meet up tomorrow and I'll tell you anything. Heck, if I

break the promise, you can do anything you want with me. You can sell me, fuck me, do whatever,” Summer said, completely dropping her noblewoman act.

“Doesn’t that phrase go ‘you can cook me, boil me, or do whatever’?”

“Wait, is that what you’re into? Groooss. I’m a Succubus and even I think that’s grooooooss... Er, kidding, just kidding. I’ve been pretending to be a human so long I kind of just knee-jerk make fun of fetishes? Naturally, I’ll play along with any kink! I can change my face, too, so I can do things even your little girlfriend there can’t!”

Eh. Whatever. In any case, I used the {Treaty} to make a contract with Summer. Summer even went so far as to suggest locking it down to June 1st to make doubly sure, and if we didn’t manage to see each other, we could just repeat the process. Seemed like she was completely ready to tell us what she knew.

And so, I told Summer what we had done since coming here.

“Uhhh, I think we went to that store around noon.”

“Could you be a bit more specific?”

“I don’t know what to tell you, we went when we were hungry, that’s all.”

“Oh,” Rokuko interjected, “That was about twenty minutes after the lunch bell rang.”

“Why do you remember that, Rokuko?”

Summer really pushed for details, checking the dates and times for everything. Not really understanding why, we answered Summer’s questions without spilling any of our secrets. She sure had a lot of questions for someone who supposedly didn’t have time to answer ours.

“Thanks, Rokuko. You sure helped me out a lot.”

“Eheh, don’t worry about it. We’re friends, aren’t we?”

Huh? When did Rokuko and Summer get so close? She’s not being charmed, is she? She’s still wearing the Lionheart Bracelets?

“By the way, Master, Rokuko decided Summer was her friend since she praised her relationship with you.”

Whoa, random advice from Kosaki. Seems like Summer had deepened their bond without the use of skills... That was yet another strategy Succubi had for winning their targets over. Good grief, will Succubi ever not be a pain?!

“Hey, Succubus bitch. Don’t mess with my Rokuko.”

“My name is Summer, good sir, and please do not say such slanderous things. I am simply attempting to gather what information I can,” she protested. Still, why did she want to ask so much about my schedule?

Well, we answered all her questions. Surely she’ll be willing to answer at least one of ours.

“Hey, Summer—” I began, only to be interrupted.

“THE FIRST PRINCE, PRINCE HARKES DAIDE, HAS RETUUURNED!”

What incredible timing. The first prince had arrived at the party.

“Oh shit,” Summer said, grimacing as if she had bitten down on a bug. *What do you mean, ‘oh shit’?!*

“Summer! Summer, where are you?! Oooh! There you are, Summer!”

And on top of everything, the first prince immediately launched into a mad dash right toward us. *Hey, prince, shouldn’t you be greeting the king first?!*

He had brought his two lackeys with him. I didn’t see the ‘shadow’ adventurer with them. They had probably returned home, having completed their mission.

“Summer! Aaah, my beloved!”

“Prince Harkes, aaah, um, w-welcome home!”

Despite being picked up and swung through the air like a child, Summer put on a smile so cute one could practically hear a sparkling sound effect.

“It’s a bit jealousy inducing, but you do make a heartwarming pair. Could you share a bit with us?” Crusch said.

“My thoughts exactly. Give ’er here, Harkes,” Kenho agreed.

“Ahaha, I can’t budge, not even for my left-and right-hand men! You can greet them though, my love.”

“Erm, welcome back, Lord Crusch, Lord Kenho,” Summer said, putting on the tone that she was only greeting them because the prince had allowed it. The two lackeys smiled happily nonetheless. *Er, is that really what you want?*

“Hrm? Who is this man?” the prince asked, glaring sharply at me.

“Er, me? Uhhh, I’m...” I trailed off, not sure how to explain this.

“Excuse me. I am Rokuko Tsia, one whom Lady Summer has graced with her companionship at the Royal Academy. This man is my husband,” Rokuko said, and the prince’s expression flipped as soon as he heard the word husband.

“Ah, I see! You are Summer’s school friend, and he is your husband! Hrm... You weren’t discussing taking Summer as a second wife, were you?”

“I would never dream of it. I have eyes for only one woman. Right, Rokuko?”

“Indeed.”

“Hrm, I see. I appreciate loyal men like that. After all, I’m just as loyal to Summer,” the prince said, begging a flirty tirade that I really couldn’t care less about.

“Incidentally, prince, should you not go greet your father?” Rokuko interjected once the ranting calmed down a bit.

“Oh, yes, that’s right! If you’ll excuse me, Summer, I’ll be right back.”

“Right...” Summer watched the prince and his retinue go with a somewhat tired expression.

“So, the prince and his squad are all in love with you, huh?”

“It is all but guaranteed that the prince will be relinquishing his status, though. The Tindalos house is simply too powerful... In any case, I gave him a bit of attention, and in an instant he just... His retinue, as well. I’m used to it by now, I suppose. Oh, and to be clear, I did not use {Charm} at all. I have my pride, at least.”

It seemed that even princes fell like nothing to the effortless charms of a

Succubus. Or well, maybe the prince's group was especially weak minded. Really, it was more than possible that if she had tried to use {Charm}, the anti-charm equipment they were no doubt wearing would have protected them.

"Also, Rokuko, you sure just casually called me your husband, huh?"

"What, got a problem? We have a kid already, you know."

"Nh. What'll you do if Haku hears, huh?"

"We can just say I said it because we have a kid."

Yeah, okay, I have no more escape routes. I need to strengthen my anti-Haku armor once we get back.

"I say, welcome back!"

"Welcome back!"

After splitting up from Summer and returning, we found the rest of our group devouring the feast. Niku and Ichika were digging in, too.

"Here you go, big sis! Aaaahn!" Soto said.

"You got it, girl! Maids gotta follow orders, so I've got no choice! Aaahn," Ichika replied, opening her mouth wide.

"Nom nom..."

Incidentally, Koreha was nowhere to be seen. She had apparently gone off to talk to one of the first prince's retinue... Crusch, who was actually her older brother.

"You should try this roast beef, Keima. It's pretty good. But anyway... Find anything out?" Wataru asked.

"Not telling. Who knows how your {Ultra Good Fortune} would mess with it."

"Guess I really can't help out this time. If only I could turn it off..."

I'd be more scared of what would happen in the rebound of you turning it off.

And that was when yet another stir came at the entrance to the party.

"THE SECOND PRINCE, PRINCE JEDHA DAIDE, HAS ARRIIIIIVED!"

It seemed the second prince had arrived. There were quite a lot of people

talking. Apparently the second prince had brought something unusual.

“Oh, looks like he’s coming this way,” Wataru observed.

“I say, it feels as if he is looking at me,” Mephy said. Though that wasn’t just a feeling; he was blatantly staring at her. No doubt it was the same look the first prince gave Summer.

The unusual thing behind the prince became more clear as he approached. It seemed to be an egg, and a pretty big one, too; it had a blue pallor to it, and was about as tall as a child. It was resting on a box filled with straw, which a maid was pulling on a cart.

“Princess Emmymephy. Good evening.”

“My, my, if it isn’t Prince Jedha. Good evening. What might that large egg be, may I ask?”

“Certainly. It is...” The second prince paused to kneel, take Emmymephy’s hand, and look up at her. “The egg of a dragon. I have defeated a dragon, and this egg is proof. Aaah... I am told that defeating a dragon was a requirement for proposing to you. Princess Emmymephy, please, accept my feelings.”

A Dragon’s egg. The party fell silent as the second prince asked for Emmymephy’s hand in marriage with it. All eyes fell on the two of them. The audience swallowed as they waited to hear Emmymephy’s response.

“A-A Dragon egg... I say, do you speak true?”

“Yes. I challenged a Dragon, and won this egg as proof. Though, of course, I did have companions with me. We defeated the Dragon, and upon exploring its nest further, discovered this egg.”

Emmymephy glanced our way. “I say, at times like this, I have experts on Dragons determine whether the proof is real or not!”

“That is... Wataru the Hero. I have no reason to refuse a Hero who infamously defeated a Dragon himself.”

“And so, give it a look, Rokuko!” Emmymephy exclaimed.

“Wait, me?” Rokuko blinked. But on second thought, she often had tea parties with her Dragon friends. Although that was a secret, Emmymephy had

heard Rokuko rave about her love of Dragons quite often on our trip together. We had... quite a lot of time to kill, after all.

“Hold on a moment, Princess Emmymephy. Why do you not choose Wataru?” the second prince asked.

“He can look, too. I say, whatever works.”

“Wait, me too? Er, I’m not really too confident here... Keima, you have a look. Aren’t you friends with a dragon expert?”

“The hell? Do you think I could smith a sword just because I’m friends with a blacksmith? Rokuko knows way more than me.”

“Still, you’re better than a random nobody. You made that whole game of life earlier.”

I mean, sure, I know more about Dragons than a random guy on the street, but I can’t compare to Rokuko. After all, she’s even seen her neighbor’s unfertilized eggs before. I hadn’t been allowed to see them, since, quote, “I AIN’T ABOUT TO SHOW MY UNFERTILIZED EGGS TO A MAN WHO AIN’T EVEN MY HUSBAND!” Bizarre. She would have shown me fertilized eggs, then...?

“So, Rokuko. What can you tell?” I asked.

“Let’s see here. There aren’t any patterns on it, so at best it’s the egg of a half-Dragon... Maybe it’s the egg of a Wyvern or something?” Rokuko suggested. The unfertilized eggs of Redra (a Red Dragon) and Igni (a Flame Dragon) had apparently been covered with elaborate patterns.

“Is Rokuko the Dragon expert?” Wataru asked.

“Nah, she just has an obsession with them. Does she look like Igni’s mother to you?”

“Oh, good point. I forgot Igni’s mom was the Dragon expert.”

Funny to think that Igni fed Wataru one of her eggs as an omelet. Not that he knows about it. She said something about it being a replacement for her tail. Whew lad.

“Err, but yeah, I think it’s a Wyvern egg, too. The faint power radiating from it feels like one,” Wataru said, being the most trusted out of anyone here when it

came to judging the egg.

“Hrm... I say, Wyverns are technically half-Dragons, so it does fill the condition, but only the bare minimum. You will be, at best, at the very bottom of the list of marriage candidates,” Emmymephy said.

“That’s fine with me. One day, I will defeat a real Dragon. All for you,” the second prince said, kissing the back of Emmymephy’s hand. A cheer arose through the crowd.

Is that really something to celebrate? A second prince, being on the bottom of the candidate list...? Guess that just goes to show how strong the empire is.

“Everyone! I ask for your silence!” came a booming voice. The king had stood up on the second floor, and was now looking down upon everyone. His voice led to instant silence. However, the fervor was still palpable in the air.

“Well done on slaying a Dragon... a half-Dragon, my son, Jedha!”

“Yes, sir! Your praise honors me.”

“To respect your accomplishments, I now proclaim you the crown prince, Jedha. Is there anyone who would object to this?”

The crowd remained silent. However, it felt as if the fervor was swelling in its intensity.

“It seems not. In which case, Prince Jedha is now th—”

“Wait, Father! I object, I have an objection!” the first prince shouted down from the dance area on the first floor. “Am I not the crown prince?!”

“Tell me this, Harkes. Did you accomplish anything of note yourself? You embarked on a journey, even at the cost of abandoning your schoolwork, and yet what do you have to show for it? Nothing. Some Iron Golem corpses at best. The most I can praise you for is returning alive at all.”

“Ngh...!”

The first prince faltered. Hunting Iron Golems was blatantly less impressive than Wyverns. The difficulty levels were in different leagues.

“Jedha relied entirely on his companions for his accomplishment. But I hunted

the Golems with my own hand!”

“Having worthy companions is the mark of a true king.”

It seemed that Jedha had some pretty skilled companions with him. They were at least strong enough to hunt a Wyvern.

“But at this rate... I won’t be able to make Summer the queen!”

“Prince Harkes, I do not mind this. I am not fit to be queen.”

“What incredible humility!”

No matter how much Summer tried to back off, the first prince wanted her to be queen no matter what. Despite the fact that nobody would be happy if Summer did end up queen. Or well, I guess the first prince would be happy, and oblivious.

“Ngh, but what about my plan to make Summer queen, and Koreha my concubine...?!”

“Prince Harkes. Have you forgotten that your engagement with Lady Koreha was canceled?”

“But I couldn’t make Summer do all of the queen’s duties herself, could I?!”

“As I said, I am unfit to be... Ah, never mind. Can I go home?” Summer asked, sighing. Almost as if she had given up...

Suddenly, a chill ran over me, and I got goosebumps.

“Hm. Looks like she gave up,” came a familiar voice from the side. A cold sweat ran down my back.

“L-Leona?”

“That’s riiight, Keima.”

I turned, and without any warning or indication she had ever entered the room, I found Leona, the red-eyed, black-haired nun, just standing there. She gave me a small wave... She was close, but it didn’t look like Wataru, Rokuko, or anyone else had seen her.

It was like she and I had been cut off from the rest of time.

“What are you... Wait, no, *why* are you here?” I asked, freezing over a bit at her sudden attack.

Leona smiled. “Why do you think? I’m not about to miss the climax. I always planned on waiting for today and watching from the outside, you know?”

The climax. In other words, this was a *show* that Leona had set up.

“Still, it’d be boring for her to just give up here. I want her to flail, to struggle, and to shamelessly claw for victory no matter how pathetic she looks.”

“Now that’s some bad taste.”

“My, my! For you to say that to me, Keima... Well, it’s the highest praise!” Leona exclaimed with a giggle. I absolutely was not praising her, though.

“What’s your objective here?”

“My objective? Hahaha, this is an experiment, all an experiment. I’m not about to say anything more than that. If you’re curious, ask someone else. Dooon’t worry, you have plenty of time,” Leona said, then made a magic circle rise above her palm. It was no simple circle, and was instead one of those three-dimensional spheres made of multiple interlocking circles. It spun so quickly it was impossible to read, and it was surrounded by a barrier.

“It’s already complete this time. Nothing you can do to stop it,” she said.

“Couldn’t you spoil your plan a little? You and I are in this together, aren’t we?”

“Ahaha, nice try. But things aren’t quite over yet... Have a look. The first prince and his retinue are lambasting the villainess,” Leona said, pointing. Suddenly, I could hear voices from outside our time pocket.

“Koreha, did you do this?! What did you say to Summer?!”

“You’re mistaken. I didn’t do anything.”

“Good grief. I’m ashamed to have you as a little sister, Koreha. To think you would pretend to be her friend, all for this...”

“I am saying I did nothing. Do you have no working ears, dear brother?”

“But look at what Summer’s turned into... It has to be your work, Lady

Koreha!”

“Have you simpletons even a brain shared between you?! I am saying I did nothing!” Koreha said, but even as the mob showered her with accusations, Summer made no move to protect her. Rather, she had plopped down onto the floor, and was spacing out with a look of defeat. I couldn’t imagine an expression that conveyed greater surrender to fate.

“Aaah, geez, why is this happening? Is this what mob mentality refers to?! Summer, say something! At this rate, I’ll be executed!”

“Meeeh, whatever. It’s already over, so, well, have fun?”

“What are you saying, Summer?!”

“Gah! Don’t think I have feelings for you just because we used to be engaged!” the first prince declared! “I’ll never marry you now!”

“How many times do I have to say it?! The engagement was canceled an eternity ago! And if you ask me, Prince Jedha is much more to my tastes as a cute shota!”

The two of them raged in a heated argument while Summer continued to refuse to engage whatsoever. Seeing that, Leona sighed.

“I fiddled with things to make this a more likely outcome, but still, it does feel a bit unnatural. What do you think, Keima?”

“You planned this? Then why are you complaining? If things go as planned, just be happy your plans worked,” I said. Leona nodded.

“You have a point. I suppose I’m getting a bit greedy out of boredom. This will have to do. And so, with the game over, I’ll be taking my leave,” Leona said. The barrier around the magic sphere disappeared, and said sphere began to shine with a black light.

“Next time, don’t waste your time investigating nothing, and actually involve yourself more. Okay? Okay. Until we meet again... {Release}.”

And then—the world went dark.

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“—ma, Keima? What’s wrong?”

I was sitting on a comfortable sofa. Wataru woke me up, and suddenly my consciousness snapped back to reality.

“Uh, Wataru? What happened to the night party...?”

“Night party? What are you talking about?” Wataru asked, tilting his head. It was bright outside the windows, and seemed to be about noon. It seemed I had passed out for half a day. Rokuko, Soto, Ichika, and Niku were here, too. Plus Emmymephy. Seemed like everyone was safe.

“Alright, bring me up to speed. How long was I unconscious? Where are we?”

“Huh? What do you mean, how long? You just kind of dozed off for a second. As for where we are... Well, I guess I should say, welcome to Daide!”

Huh?

On second thought, this place did seem familiar. I only remembered after Wataru said, ‘Welcome to Daide,’ but this was the waiting room by the gate we were taken to after arriving at Daide.

“Why are we here...?”

“I mean, we got a letter from Haku telling us to pick you up here. And Rokuko, Kuro, and Ichika came with you. But, uh... Who’s the black-haired girl?” Wataru asked, looking at Soto curiously.

“What’re you talking about, Wataru? It’s Soto. I told you she was my daughter.”

“Oh, your daughter... Wait, your daughter?! Wh-What?! When did this happen?!” Wataru exclaimed, as if this was news to him. *What? Why act so surprised after so long?*

“Uh... Keima? Wh-Who’s the mother? Just asking to be safe.”

“Me, duh?” Rokuko answered.

“When did...? She’s so big...”

“Also, she’s my little sister,” Niku said, sliding forward. I felt a sense of déjà

vu... or rather, it felt like my memories were being replayed word for word.

“Kuro’s little sister... Wait, what?! Does that make you Keima’s daughter, too...? But you’re a beastkin...”

“They have different mothers. Happens all the time, doesn’t it?” I asked, playing along myself.

“I-I guess, maybe...? Wait, doesn’t that mean you’re keeping your daughter as a slave...?”

“She also has a different father.”

“That means you’re not related at all!”

Yeah, it was the same as before. The only difference was how Soto and I were reacting.

“Hey, watch your mouth. Me and big sis are connected by the soul. We’re soul sisters,” Soto said cautiously, as if probing for more information just as I was.

“Correct. Soto and I are soul sisters.”

“S-Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. You’re still family, even if not by blood.”

Having come this far, Soto timidly looked my way and asked the big question.

“Um, papa. This is a loop, isn’t it?”

“...Ahhh.”

A loop. With that deadly concept in mind, I looked at Wataru.

“Wataru, what day is it?”

“Hm? Let’s see...”

Wataru answered: it was May 1st. The day we had first come to Daide.

Chapter 3

May 1st. The date Wataru said was the day we had first come to Daide. It was safe to say at this point that we had looped back in time. However, Wataru and Emmymephy didn't remember anything. Nor did Niku or Ichika, or even Rokuko. Though Soto seemed to remember things just like I did, for some reason.

"A loop, huh?"

"What are you talking about, Keima? Explain," Rokuko said with a serious expression. Seemed like she understood that something big had happened.

"I'm not entirely sure how or why, but what I'm about to say is completely true. I came from the future," I said, which made Emmymephy tilt her head.

"You traveled backwards in time? I say, I've never heard of such a thing happening before."

"Whether you have or not, something like that happened. If it were just me, it'd be possible that I just had fake memories implanted in my mind or I was shown a series of illusions, but Soto also having memories makes that a lot less likely. Let's see, how do I prove this..." I paused, trying to think of something I could say which would prove I had future knowledge. "Wataru, you were going to brag to me about this country's toilets having washlets, weren't you? You talked my ear off about it in the previous loop."

"Oh, you know about the toilets? Okay, I'll believe you," Wataru said, believing me so quickly it almost took the wind out of my sails. "Well, I mean, it's possible you knew about them beforehand, but I generally think it's best to trust you with things like this. You don't really like this kind of thing, Keima."

"Uh-huh. I agree," Rokuko said.

"I say, you have my trust as well. We don't know what's going on, so just tell us what you know."

Perhaps thanks to the fruits of my honest lifestyle, everyone believed me

right away. Soto was also there to add to my explanations. Incidentally, we explained who she was to them again.

“So, what should we do now, Keima?”

“...Dunno. I need to think about this for a bit. Let’s just go to the inn for now.”

We couldn’t hang around in the waiting room forever. Wataru guided us to the inn, and we arrived after once again taking several mysterious detours. It felt like it was in a slightly different place than before, but that was probably just something time-related.

Anyway, as soon as we got to our room, we wrote a mail to Haku. We wrote that we had made contact with Leona, and that time was likely being rolled back. Once we added the date, we sent it off, and...

“Huh?”

The mail didn’t send. For a second I fiddled with the mail menu, wondering if something was broken, but soon enough we got a mail in our own inbox. Sent from Leona.

Sooooorry, the mail function is temporarily closed! Oh, but don’t worry, I sent Haku the same reports as you did last time! As a side note, you’re trapped in Daide and can’t leave! Good luck! Uhhh. What? So she’s hijacked the mail function? Leona took it over? And she knows the mails we sent last time?

“...This is crazy. But I guess that’s it for mails.”

The terrifying thing was that Leona apparently had access to all the mails we had ever sent. Actually terrifying.

That said, this at least gave me a clue as to why Soto had kept her memories, too. If Leona was spying on us, all the pieces came falling into place. Leona had probably taken a liking to Soto, just as she had with me. After all, Soto was a Dungeon Core that could use faux Hero Powers she inherited from me.

“We need to start by gathering information,” I mused.

Thinking about what came next, there was one person who likely also retained their memory from previous loops. And if my prediction was correct, I’d be able to contact them tomorrow.

And so came tomorrow, May 2nd. I left the inn, claiming to get breakfast, and found a pink-haired rich girl who dropped her handkerchief while passing by. I picked it up. She instantly turned around and spoke to me.

“Aaah! Oh, I thank you ever so much. That handkerchief belonged to my mother, a—”

“Hey, it’s not the date we agreed on, but how about you tell me what you know?”

“Ah?!” The woman did a double take of sheer surprise. “Y-Y-Y-Y-Yo... You remember that?!”

“Sure seems like you knew this was gonna happen, huh, Lady Summer?”

Indeed. It was Summer, the former-commoner daughter of a baron who had specifically stated a day after the loop for us to speak. Thinking back, all the questions she had asked us had been to get an idea of our whereabouts. She was gathering information to use next loop—in other words, this loop.

“I think I’ve got a good grasp of what’s going on now. Want to grab some tea and talk about what comes next?”

“Yes, gladly!” Summer said with a beaming smile. We went into a nearby cafe.

* * *

“Finally, finally a clue for escaping this mess! So, how far back do your memories go?” she asked, cutting straight to the point.

“It happened to me two days ago, right after we signed our contract. My memories cut off at the end of the party. Though any traces of the Contract magic are completely gone now.”

“So this would be the second loop to you, then?”

“Yeah. What loop are you on, Summer? Judging by your questions last time, I figure it wasn’t your fourth.”

“This would be my seventeenth loop, I believe... This is the first time the starting date of the loop has changed. Before now, I’ve been looping through

the entire year, from the day I first entered the academy.”

That was a surprise. I figured she was on her second or third, given how experienced she seemed and how she had ignored the princes’ quarrel, but wow. Seventeen, huh?

“You loop back after that party every time, don’t you?”

“One time, it happened three days later. My head was chopped off by the guillotine. That was the only time I appreciated this loop...”

“Guillotine? The heck were you doing?” I asked, giving her a stern look.

“I-It’s all ancient history, don’t ask! I just decided to let loose and obey my lusts, that’s all! It was terrible, my Succubus nature was found out and they sealed my magic to prevent my escape!”

“I-I see...”

In any case, listening to Summer was giving me a pretty good idea of Leona’s game here. In the past Leona was trying to make a story... and now she had added saving and loading to that. She put someone in a set period of time and had them loop it over and over, just like someone resetting a game.

This was basically a romance game fit into real life. A normal reality show would only ever meet one ending, but by having the heroine (Summer) retain her memories, she could have it end differently every time. Leona saying things weren’t over yet had been pointing to the loop.

Is she a demon or something? Oh, I guess she actually is an evil god. Good grief, this must suck for Summer... Oh, wait, now Soto and I are wrapped up in it, too. Yeah, this is pretty much the worst.

“So, the loop started later this time because of you all arriving, right? It’s safe to say I’ve finally reached the hidden Keima route, right?!”

“Probably, but... Wait, hidden? Are there not-hidden routes?”

“Mhm. I can show you the documents I got tomorrow if you want.”

“Documents? What kind?”

“How do I put this... They had information about routes and romance targets.

Oh, the Keima route just had your name and an illustration of your face, no details about the route itself. I never thought you'd have a kid, though."

Apparently she had been asking such detailed questions about my schedule because she planned to "coincidentally" make contact with me and conquer me à la a heroine in a visual novel. She had abandoned everything else at the party to focus on gathering intel.

"Pretty much all of it is worthless now, but still, I'm glad. If I can win your heart, this loop will end for sure! I mean, it's a hidden route, after all! No way will it keep going after I win this!" Summer exclaimed with a happy smile. That said, I didn't share her optimism. Leona didn't play like that.

"Were you always in this country, hiding your Succubus nature and trying to infiltrate the government?" I asked.

"Hm? Oh, no. I used to be in a Dungeon. I was part of something called the Four Heavenly Kings or whatever. But I ran away, and got scouted while finding a way out. What about it?"

"Oh, nothing, I just thought that if you had a history here, that might have something to do with how to escape the loop. If not, it doesn't really... Wait, Four Heavenly Kings? You're a Succubus that ran from a Dungeon...?"

"That's right. I've been terrified of squirrels ever since..."

"Squirrels..."

Now that rang a bell.

"...Have you ever heard of Core 564?"

"Why do you know that name? He used to be my boss."

It seemed the Succubus that had surrendered in the Dungeon Battle without fighting had ran all this way. That was a surprising connection... But then again, Leona was at the Dungeon Battle, so she might've just scouted her there.

"Let's just say I know him. How I know is a secret, though."

"I see. Well, if you wanna drag me back, go ahead. Heck, if you can get me out of this cursed country, I'll gladly follow you anywhere."

“Can you not leave?”

“Nope... I tried in the second loop or so, but there’s some kind of invisible wall that only I can’t go through. I nearly got crushed inside of a wagon.”

She crashed into the invisible wall, but the wagon kept going. She would’ve been crushed to death if the back of the wagon hadn’t had open space. That was terrifying to think about. I wondered what the barrier was blocking, exactly. It was safe to say that Soto and I were locked inside too, though Wataru and the others were up in the air.

“Anyway, we can talk details after I see the documents you’re talking about. And just to be clear, I’m not planning to let you ‘win’ me.”

“Awww, but why?!”

“Considering the personality of the person behind this, I doubt the loop will end there.”

“B-But, how about just once? Will you try it one time?” Summer asked, trying to cling onto me.

“Nope. I’m loyal, you see.”

“Can’t you make an exception? I mean... doesn’t my body turn you on?” Summer asked, spreading the top of her shirt with her fingers to show her cleavage.

“That won’t work. I have anti-charm equipment.”

“Tch, right, you mentioned that at the party. Why do you wear those all the time? Are you royalty or something? Paranoia isn’t attractive in a man, you know. Thanks to that, I can’t even read your preferences.”

It seemed Kosaki was silently but efficiently doing her job. That was a relief; if she had shown me her feet, my heart might have actually stirred a bit.

“Guess my only choice is to conquer you the normal way... which won’t be easy since you know my identity. Aaah, what a pain! Couldn’t you just fall in love at the drop of a hat after I bump into you while turning a corner with toast in my mouth like the first prince did?”

“Nope. Also, be serious.”

What kind of generic first meeting is that? The prince should be the main romance target, he's a prince.

"Anyway, I want information. Bring me those documents you were talking about."

"Sure, I'll get them to you tomorrow. We can meet up at your inn, right?"

And so, my meeting with the heroine in Loop 2 ended pretty constructively.

...Incidentally, when I returned to the inn, I found it had caught on fire. Nobody was hurt, but we had to stay in a different one.

Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} definitely did that, right? Oh, we agreed to meet in the inn, and then it immediately caught fire. What a tragedy... Oh, you're fine since you have insurance? If fact, you're profiting from it? Wow, {Ultra Good Fortune} sure goes all the way. Spooky stuff.

* * *

"Why did it burn down?"

"There are many mysteries in life."

The next day, I met up with Summer at the wreckage of the inn, with Wataru and Emmymephy staying behind. The reasoning for that was naturally due to not knowing what {Ultra Good Fortune} would do. We didn't want it causing more destruction to avoid the worst-case scenario, and so they understandably agreed not to tag along.

I brought Summer to a restaurant. It was a restaurant where one could borrow rooms, and there we met up with Rokuko, who had already reserved a room. I had told her ahead of time that Summer was a Succubus and she needed to wear her Divine Lionheart Bracelet. Soto and the others didn't have anti-charm equipment, so they were stealthily participating from my {Storage} dungeon.

"Greetings, I am Summer Yog-Sothoth. I am the daughter of a baron."

"I'm Rokuko. You know who I am, I guess? That saves some time."

"Indeed. I look forward to working with you."

Summer was putting on her noble girl act, probably because she had interpreted Rokuko as being someone important.

“And here are the documents I discussed,” Summer said, taking out a stack of A4-size copy paper. The letters were printed and neat. The red stamps saying “Top Secret” and “Corporate Documents” felt like Leona’s work.

“Design Document for the Real Otome Game, *Show Me☆Your Face! The God of Chaos is Watching.*”

“I’m the protagonist of it... or the heroine, rather, it seems.”

I flipped through the pages and saw the list of people with routes: there was the student council of Harkes Daide, Crusch Nyarlathotep, and Kenho Cthugha; the elementary students Jedha Daide, Meter Dagon, and Lacie Dagon; there were some people I didn’t know, Djungarian Hastur and Madam Dagon; and then finally myself. Each had a black-and-white portrait, and everyone but me had a list of their traumas, motivations, and even fetishes. There was also a rough plot summary for each, styled as predictions of the future. However, each had the following note: *These are production notes, and do not consider what impact the reincarnatees will have.*

“Reincarnatees... As in, people who have reincarnated?” I asked.

“They are people who were reborn into this world with memories of a country called Japan, like Koreha. I’ve confirmed the existence of two other reincarnatees other than her,” Summer said. It seemed those reincarnatees had made it impossible for her to conquer the Djungarian and Madam routes.

“Also... I barely remember this, since I was given these documents over a decade ago from my perspective, but she said that they would have partial memories of the story implanted in them. Koreha thus knows some of these documents, but in reality...”

We could conclude that in reality the “reincarnatees” were actually just people who had had their memories modified. That was probably why Wataru had said he didn’t sense that Koreha was Japanese.

Anyway, I took a closer look at the documents while listening to Summer.

The story for the first prince’s route seemed to be about Summer completing

romance events while Koreha bullied her at school, hid her things, surrounded her with lackeys, pushed her down the stairs to the point of serious injury, *etc.* The final scene would be the first prince dramatically canceling his engagement with Koreha at the night party. He would then get newly engaged with Summer, and the happy end would be them kissing happily. The game would run for one year and two days.

Leona had mentioned the word “villainess” before the loop happened. If Summer was the protagonist, then no doubt Koreha was the villainess, her rival in love. I honestly liked that kind of girl more than the protagonist who stole her prince away.

“But nothing went as planned,” Summer said.

Koreha’s engagement with the first prince had been canceled before the game began. And nothing went right when she tried to recreate the described story. The romance events activated, but no bullying or anything happened. She ended up trying to fake the bad things happening to her, but her deception was revealed at the night party, and she ended up imprisoned with hard evidence.

“I recall her mocking laughter as the first prince clung to Koreha. It was very memorable.”

“Yeah, I can imagine that.”

Summer spent a bit of time in prison, and just as she was starting to plan to run away, she found herself standing in front of the academy gates on the first day of school. Thus concluded Summer’s first loop.

“That was when I tried to run, but I couldn’t escape Daide,” she said, referring to her almost-suffocation in the wagon. She might’ve actually died if the wagon had been moving any faster.

“And then I found this note... *You haven’t finished your job yet, have you? Good luck, good luck♪*”

She then spent the second and third loops targeting different routes, but those didn’t go well, either. Apparently due to Koreha, their backgrounds didn’t match the setting document, with things like them not having the described traumas at all. In the fourth loop she got impatient and used her Succubus

powers at full blast to drown the country in a sea of lust, which got her guillotined. She didn't want to talk about it.

"The fifth loop I focused on gathering intel, and on the sixth loop I tried seeing if I could fix things somehow by becoming friends with Koreha. From there, I just kind of conquered each route one by one."

Gambling that "You haven't finished your job" meant she would be freed if she conquered every route, she conquered everyone she could, then used her Succubus powers to forcibly conquer the two she couldn't normally. But from there the mysterious "Keima" figure never showed up, so she started investigating how to get him to appear.

"And then the sixteenth loop happened. You finally arrived, Keima! But, well..."

She found me in the dungeon drills, only to discover I was already married, and had a kid. She had no idea what to do, so she decided to focus on gathering intel for a loop or two.

"And now we're here," Summer concluded.

"...I see. So in short, you think the loops will end if you conquer me?"

"Yes. Finishing all the routes would mean finishing my job, so that has to be it," Summer said, then looked at Rokuko with eyes full of burning hope. "So please, Rokuko, let me conquer Keima! Please!" She bowed her head as low as it would go. "I don't think Keima will ever bend without your permission, so please, grant me this!"

Rokuko put a contemplative hand on her cheek. "Mm. So you say, but... I don't think it'll actually work."

"But why?!" Summer blinked in shock.

"In the end, everything depends on how Leona feels, right? Well, now that she has a new toy like Keima here, don't you think the looping will continue regardless of what you do? I mean, this is Leona we're talking about," Rokuko said; a very, very convincing argument.

"B-But... What should I do, then...?"

“Oh my. You’re thinking about this all wrong. Isn’t that right, Keima?” Rokuko asked with a smile.

“Yeah. I mean, you shouldn’t think about this like playing along with her then being set free. She’ll torture you forever like that. She’s tried that with us before.”

Indeed. I was referring to when Leona first came to our town and we faced off. At the time, Leona kidnapped Niku and forced us to play along with her games. She said that it would be over once we earned enough points, but Leona controlled the point distribution, and the goal line was infinitely high. If we hadn’t said or done anything about that, she would have kept teasing us until she got bored, however many years or decades that took.

“After all, she’s been alive for about five hundred years, and it’s safe to say she’s immortal. You’ll only suffer if you try to play along with an immortal and their sense of time. I mean, you’ve been stuck looping seventeen whole times, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Summer admitted, since that was just a fact.

“Basically, you need to rethink things on a fundamental level,” I said, which made Summer tilt her head.

“What do you mean?”

“Summer. What’s your goal here? What do you want to do?”

“My goal...? I mean, to get out of the loop, obviously.”

“Is it really, though?”

“What are you even trying to say?”

“I mean, I just don’t see the need for breaking out of the loop myself. Let’s say you get out and escape Daide; what would you want to do on the outside?”

“Well, ummm...” Summer fell into thought, rubbing her temples. “I would want to have fun?”

“And are any of those ways of having fun things you couldn’t do in Daide?”

“I suppose not...”

Indeed. After all, there were plenty of fun things to do in Daide. It was filled to the brim with attractions built by the “reincarnatees” Leona prepared. It even had a ton of tourist attractions.

“Oh, maybe I want to eat tasty food?”

“Daide’s food is pretty good, y’know. Its worst food is better than a lot of the best stuff you can get in any other country.”

Likewise for that. Daide even had sweets straight from Japan.

“I want to sleep with hot dudes!”

“This country is filled with them.”

The whole roster of dudes for her to conquer were engineered to be hot. Oh, though I wasn’t an option.

“In short, Summer, there’s absolutely no need for you to escape the time loop to do what you want.”

“Then what am I supposed to do with all of this?!” Summer exclaimed, smacking the table with the stack of papers.

“Ignore it?”

“Ignore it?!” Summer balked.

“Yeah. Just ignore the romance events and other events that might pop up from now on. There’s no need for you to play along with this game at all!”

“B-But, at this point in the loop, I’ve already half finished conquering the first prince and the student council... I can’t just abandon it now... I have schoolwork to do, too...”

Man, just how diligent is this Succubus? Didn’t she refuse to fight in Core 564’s dungeon, and just ran away instead? Oh, but I guess she did try to run away once this time. Maybe after over ten loops of this, she’s been influenced by the heroine’s “diligent personality” and ended up diligent herself. Wear the mask long enough and it becomes who you really are, as they say.

“You’ve looped sixteen times already, haven’t you? Just consider this a break. Worst case scenario, you just have to come to the night party, yeah?”

“A break... Well, I guess I do deserve at least a little break,” Summer said, nodding to herself.

“Alright. So, let me ask again. Why do you want out of the loop?”

“I mean, I can’t leave the country otherwise.”

“There’s plenty of people who live their whole lives without leaving their country, no? There’s no washlet toilets outside of Daide.”

“But time doesn’t move forward.”

“That just means you can relax and not worry too much about your lifespan. Though I don’t know how long Succubi live for.”

“I want to have fun!”

“Then have fun here. Naturally you’ll get guillotined if you go too far, but thanks to all the reincarnatees, this country is filled with more fun things to do than most countries, no? Especially with food. Oh, and thanks to the loop you don’t even need to worry about your weight. You can even use your money on whatever you want. What, you don’t have savings? Then take out a loan, the loop will take it away anyway. How about spending some time seeing how far you can go with your fun?”

Summer blinked rapidly.

“N-Now that you mention it, there’s literally nothing bad about looping! In fact, being in a loop is universally better than normal life! What the heck?!”

“Exactly. Loops are actually pretty great!”

“I never realized!” Summer exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. “God, I was so stupid for whining about being in a loop!”

“Yup. Why’d you ever convince yourself being in a time loop was hell?”

“I have no idea. What am I even doing here? I need to go enjoy life!”

“Wait, you’re forgetting the documents.”

“Don’t need them! I have them memorized!”

And just like that, Summer had left the restaurant. Soto and the others popped out of the dungeon, as if to take her place.

“...Anyway, Soto, you can go ahead and eat these documents.”

“Oh, you don’t need them, papa?”

“I recorded every page with the menu function. I can just check the footage if I want to see them.”

After all, Leona had made those documents. There was the slight chance that just looking at them would wear down your sanity. We had just seen Summer accept going through seventeen loops and still end up completely motivated to beat the game for basically no reason. If it had some kind of curse to corrupt the reader’s mind, getting rid of them now was the best option. Soto “eating” something was actually converting the matter into DP for the dungeon, which was in other words offering up something to the gods. No better way to deal with cursed objects than that.

Soto opened her {Storage}, tossed the paper inside, and ate it. Though... wait.

“Hey, Soto. Isn’t your {Storage} dungeon connected to the outside of Daide?”

“Oh, good point. Gimme a second.”

Soto hopped into {Storage}. Aaand then came right back. Holding her nose, with teary eyes.

“Ngh. It didn’t work. There was, like, an invisible wall in the way.”

“Hit your head, huh? {Healing}.”

I healed Soto and patted her head. I didn’t know how, but apparently Daide had been disconnected on a dimensional level. If even Soto couldn’t get out, then {Teleportation} probably couldn’t, either.

“I suppose we’ll have to make do with what DP we have then,” Rokuko said.

Oh, right. There’s the DP problem, too... We’re making a bit, thanks to the bandits stuck in Soto’s dungeon, but we can’t do anything large scale with that amount.

“Alright...”

“So, Keima? Your actual thoughts?” Rokuko asked, now that I had completely gotten Summer out of our hair.

“This Chaos-run loop can eat shit. I want to get the hell out of here now.”

“Whoa momma, Master. Language,” Ichika said while pouring us tea. She set a cup of it in front of Rokuko. “What’s the plan then, my dude?”

“Getting out of the loop. I want to leave with everyone safe, and ideally without doing another loop,” I said flatly. Escaping the loop was our objective and our win condition.

“Oho. Not gonna lie, didn’t expect that. I thought for sure you’d be all about sleeping for a whole loop.”

Maybe if I were here alone. If I were put in a time loop the day I first came into this world, I would’ve applied what I said to Summer to myself and slept all day and all night for the rest of time. But I wasn’t alone anymore. I had allies, and Rokuko.

“If Rokuko kept her memories, I might not have had to be hypocritical with Summer.”

“Oh, really?” Rokuko asked. “Well, I suppose I wouldn’t be too upset about being locked in here with you either.”

If I were to be a little greedy, I’d say it would be even better if Ichika and Niku kept their memories. But really, the worst case was that all the time would catch up to us all at once when we left the loop. One or two loops would be one thing, but ten, twenty, or a hundred loops’ worth of time hitting me all at once was terrifying. And even if not, Leona was the type of person to cancel the loop at the worst possible time after we got used to it. We couldn’t let our guard down.

“Wait, did you get rid of Summer like that because...”

“Yep, I’m thinking it’d be nice if Leona canceled the loop after she started acting like an idiot and embarrassed herself. Though I doubt that’s happening, since she’s already messed up enough to get guillotined.”

In which case, it was best to keep her away and not let her help with anything.

“Also, this might help with avoiding being observed. After all, she’s the

heroine. It's pretty likely Leona's looking through her eyes."

Because, I mean, gamers generally see the game world through the eyes of the protagonist. The fact Leona scouted a Succubus made the protagonist a monster under her control. She could probably see through her eyes just like we could see through our monsters' eyes.

Things would be a bit different if all of Daide were Leona's dungeon, but if that were the case Haku never would have sent Rokuko here without noticing that fact, probably. I wanted to be a bit optimistic here.

"So, Keima. How do we get out of the loop?"

"I'll look for what's making the loop happen and destroy it. That seems like the most reliable way to get out."

"That's certainly true," Rokuko agreed.

It didn't take a genius to figure that out. Breaking the loop was a lot more reliable than trying to satisfy Leona and have her end it.

"Do you have any ideas on what she's doing to keep the loop going?" Rokuko asked.

"Yep. This may be a hint that Leona left on purpose, but... Well, if it was on purpose, then even more reason to check it out."

If she had left the hint on purpose, then this was in reality a game about escaping the loop, and the actual ending Leona wanted was us breaking free. It was a bit frustrating, but yeah, in that case we just had to play along. Since escaping the loop was our objective, clearing the game would be a true victory for us. Though it was frustrating.

"So, where should we start looking?"

"Right, I'll tell you what I'm basing this on."

I recalled what I knew from last time and explained my thought process.

First of all, what *was* a time loop, really? There were three basic possibilities that came to mind:

- 1) The memories of those in the loop being modified.

2) The erasure of records and memories of those not in the loop.

3) Time itself rewinding.

Of those three, if this were Japan, the first answer would be the most likely. The second and third would be scientifically impossible, but, well... this was a world of sword and sorcery. The third option was the most likely one here, really. It was also the easiest option, since one didn't have to think too hard about it.

That said, even with magic being normal here, traveling back in time was a myth of legend itself, even if stopping time was relatively normal. However, one could say that the legends possibly existed precisely because of it having happened for real in the past.

“So yeah, I just remembered this, but...”

Rokuko had told me about the academy's seven mysteries, and in the midst of that was... A mysterious mirror that turned back time.

“So, let's investigate the academy. There'll be something there... hopefully.”

“You don't sound too confident,” Rokuko said, smiling at that.

* * *

Once again we had Emmymephy arrange for Rokuko and Soto to start attending the academy. And this time, we started attending the day right after her request, resulting in our first day being the same as before. No doubt May 4th was just a convenient day for the academy somehow.

Just like the first loop, Rokuko used Tsia's name and presented herself as Emmymephy's friend. But unlike the first loop, we didn't explain our objectives in attending the school to Wataru and Emmymephy. We didn't want Wataru's {Ultra Good Fortune} burning down another inn, and so they accepted right away. We would be using him as a safe spot by day while keeping our distance when investigating.

“Hi, I'm Rokuko Tsia,” Rokuko said.

We were back in Daide's Royal Academy. We found ourselves in a classroom built like a stairway, just like lecture halls in Earth colleges. Rokuko introduced

herself in front of the blackboard. It was my second time seeing this.

“Rokuko, I say, over here. The seat next to me is free,” Emmymephy called.

“Ah, Mephy. I think I’ll take you up on that offer.”

Rokuko sat down in the seat next to Emmymephy’s. A small stir ran through the classroom, as anyone on such friendly terms with the imperial princess was surely a big deal, even if only in the empire itself. Rokuko didn’t have her memories of the first loop, so things went down exactly the same way.

“Anyway, I’m out. Good luck guarding them while I’m gone, Wataru.”

“Feels bad being left behind... Well, I won’t ask. If anyone asks where you went, I’ll just say you went to the bathroom.”

This was the second loop, so I could entrust guarding Rokuko to Wataru. There wouldn’t be any ambushes, according to my knowledge of Loop 1, so we could just focus on gathering intel. We had done that in Loop 1, too, but to be honest I had basically just slacked off and napped all day. Yeah.

The seven mysteries of the academy. One of them was known as the mirror which traveled through time. It was target number one, but I got the feeling Rokuko would find it faster than me. School rumors were best investigated by students, after all.

I went to the library. It was filled with rows of organized books... and on second thought, it was extremely unusual for a place in this world to have this many books. Enough books to be organized and labeled, even. Even our church’s tiny bookshelves got a lot of shock and awe.

Anyway, I was here to research the history and past incidents of the academy. Maybe something had happened during a battle for Hanako of the toilet to be born, or maybe some bullying. It would probably be faster for Rokuko to research these things, again, but nothing wrong with doing some preliminary work.

The library was pretty quiet, due in part to everyone being in class. I should probably start looking for legends and stuff. First, time to see if they have any books on the school’s history.

“Master, what book are you looking for?”

“Hm?” I turned and saw Niku standing behind me in a simple maid outfit. Maybe the school gave it to her?

“Uhhh... I’m looking for history books, or books about legends. Anything that will tell me about the school’s history.”

“Understood. I believe this is what you are looking for,” Niku said, sliding a book out of the bookshelf without a moment of hesitation.

“Er, thanks...?”

“Think nothing of it,” Niku said with a smile. Or rather, something that looked like Niku.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Oh? You don’t recognize me?”

“All I know is that you’re not our Niku.”

They looked identical, but their expressions were nothing alike. Niku never smiled like that. I furrowed my brows, feeling a bit of disgust at her cute smile.

“Oh, but I thought we looked perfectly identical. I’m surprised you noticed so quickly,” the faux-Niku said with an amused laugh. The real Niku was in the middle of guarding Soto.

“What’s going on here? Are you using Transformation magic or something?”

“Not in the least; this is my true form. Greetings, Keima. I am Toi, known in this country as Toi Tindalos,” the faux-Niku said with a polite bow. Toi... If I remembered correctly, that was the name of Niku’s sister, and an experiment of Leona’s.

“Tindalos... As in the mage corps commander?”

“I would be his granddaughter. Oh, but fear not. I am registered as a human male student for appearances, but I am a girl. Though I could grow anything you want with one of Chaos’s potions should you wish it,” Toi said, not even trying to hide anything.

Still. Tindalos’s grandchild, huh? We had missed her for the entirety of last

loop, but now here she is showing up on her own. And she works for Leona, too.

“Oh, and just to be clear, Tindalos’s true identity is Leona. Or rather, an illusion created by Leona that does not truly exist.”

I narrowed my eyes. She really wasn’t trying to hide anything.

“Incidentally, for the sake of my own edification, may I ask how you recognized I was not that disgraceful failure? Leona has told me that we look perfectly identical.”

“Niku doesn’t smile like that.”

“My my my! I apologize for failing to conduct proper research. For you to notice the difference from a mere smile, you must truly be showering the failure with your love. In place of Leona, her creator, I will express my highest thanks,” Toi said with a fancy bow of her head. With an adorable smile seemingly plastered on her face. “Incidentally, if you have any wishes to replace her, you need only say the word. I am a much more skilled toy than that failure, and will certainly satisfy your every desire.”

“No thanks. Not interested,” I said flatly, causing Toi to shake her head with exasperation. I ignored that and continued. “More importantly, what exactly are you planning?”

“What do you mean by that? I am simply fulfilling my duty of watching over Daide. I will even swear a divine oath, if need be. Shall I show you the signed order I am following? I am offended you would accuse me of plotting,” Toi said with another shake of her head.

You would be swearing an oath to Leona, the God of Chaos. As if I’d trust that.

“Why did you contact me now?”

“Leona instructed me the other day to make contact with you and serve you as necessary. I had the previous obligation of hunting a half-Dragon at the second prince’s request, but my master’s orders take priority. She told me the following: *In order for Keima to understand, tell him that he tripped the flag.* I shall simply give the second prince a chicken egg magically grown in size. Fear not, nobody will notice; this is a country of fools. Excluding those of several

generations ago, that is.”

The second prince’s request. So that was why she hadn’t been here last time. The “flag” I tripped was probably entering Loop 2.

“Why aren’t you calling her Lady Leona or Master or something? Aren’t you completely devoted to her or whatever?”

“Oh, it is common manners to address family by their first name regardless of their status when speaking with visitors. Did you not know?”

I never thought someone in Leona’s gang would lecture me about societal manners.

“Wait, you’re treating us as visitors?”

“Indeed! Welcome to Daide! This country is currently serving as a so-called ‘theme park’ that my master Leona has created. Please enjoy it to your heart’s content. Oh, and here’s a pamphlet,” Toi said, handing me a vertically folded pamphlet. I spread it out and saw that it was a map of Daide’s capital city, except marked like a literal theme park attraction. The food stands were called the food court, the merchant’s street the gift shop, *etc.* There were even famous hills and date spots of high elevation. But one thing caught my eye the most.

“The Beddhist church...”

“A highly recommended tourist spot, to be sure. It’s a renovated church of ancient Beddhism, and is quite romantic; legends say that a couple which sleeps together atop a Beddhist bed will soon be wed. That is all Leona making stuff up, of course, but it might actually work.”

I feel like it’s just logical that people close enough to sleep in bed together will end up married... though I guess jinxes work the same way. Better than just making up complete nonsense based on nothing.

“Oh, yes, please take this. It is a free pass to Beddhism,” she said, holding out a red holy symbol.

It didn’t seem to be made of rubies. Compared to this pulsating holy symbol that seemed to have the energy of fresh blood, the ruby holy symbol our High

Priestess wears almost seems like a replica.

“It’s a special holy symbol prepared for you, Keima. If you show this to any Beddhist in Daide, they will be at your beck and call. Please do keep this a secret from your lovers.”

That sounded like hypnotism, but I went ahead and took it anyway. I could use this for investigating the documents in the church or something. Though it was unlikely it had any documents not faked by Leona.

“What would happen if I asked you to reveal all of Leona’s plans?” I asked, poking Toi with the holy symbol.

“Apologies, it does not work on me. However, I will gladly warm your bed at night, and answer your questions. Shall I strip?”

“Pass. I’m more interested in Leona’s plans. What’s the nature of this experiment?” I asked, recalling how Leona had called all of this an experiment.

Toi lifted an eyebrow. “I will answer with the utmost honesty. I do not know. I was not told, and I do not care to ask. I am simply a stage setter. My job is to create playgrounds for her to enjoy. For example, the dungeon in the academy is under my jurisdiction.”

“You’re a Dungeon Master...?”

“Not quite. My role is... much like the Adventurer’s Guild. I am a secretary that manages those who enter. The dungeon itself existed before the country was founded, and I have not been told of what it is. The fact I have not been told means I do not need to know,” Toi said with a smile.

“You really don’t know? Like, you don’t know what’s happening in Daide?”

“What can I say? What occurs on a stage is not the job of the one building the stage. Toys do not decide how they are played with, no? Though, I am told a loop is occurring, but that is all. I do not experience it myself, so I have no answers for you,” Toi said. It seemed she wasn’t keeping her memories. “Oh, but I do recall my orders including a request to make a perfect stage for lovers to have thrilling romances upon. If you would be satisfied by a theory of mine... Well, Leona remains a girl at heart, despite everything. Perhaps she just wanted to create date spots and see heart-throbbing romances? Perhaps there is a

certain couple she wishes to support. For example, you and some lucky girl!”

“If that’s true, then the whole country of Daide is being messed with for our sake...”

“Does it matter? Between you and this country, you are clearly the more important one, Keima. The country is just a stage, but you are a valuable guest; the two cannot be compared.”

Well. That was certainly an attitude Leona would have.

* * *

“Wait, you met them? Despite the fact they’re Tindalos’s grandchild?”

After returning to the inn, I called Rokuko and the others over to report what had happened. Naturally, Wataru and Emmymephy were in a different room in the same inn.

“I thought we couldn’t find them at all last time,” Rokuko said.

“Yep. It happened so easily I have to wonder what the heck I was even wasting my time on back then...”

“Maybe she did this on purpose to mess with you.”

“Maybe,” I replied, though maybe this was also an act of kindness from her. Leona had said it didn’t really matter right before the loop began. “Plus, not only is she identical to Niku, she even told me that Tindalos the mage corps commander is actually Leona’s puppet.”

“...Identical to me?” Niku muttered, wearing a maid outfit (this inn’s uniform, which I had gotten for her).

“I was pretty surprised; for a second I even thought she was you. But she ended up pretty different.”

“So that is the Toi that Leona spoke of. Her name is the same as well... If I ever meet her, I will prove that I am the more useful maid,” Niku said, burning with a mysterious competitiveness. The way her face muscles refused to do their job despite the fire burning in her eyes was unmistakably Niku. Felt calming, somehow.

“So, did you learn anything else?”

“Nope. Oh, but she gave me an item to use when investigating Beddhism.”

In the end, I hadn’t been able to get anything else out of Toi Tindalos. Though I had learned a lot more than I expected, and the book she lent me was indeed about history.

“Soto, go ahead and put this into {Storage}. Be sure to stop time, too.”

“Okaaay.”

I tossed the red holy symbol over to Soto, and she put it away into {Storage}.

“I went and investigated a bunch of the school rumors, by the way,” Rokuko said. “All of the seven mysteries. The singing minstrel one hears at midnight, the forbidden hall, the dancing skeleton specimen, the stairs that grow more steps at night, the talking portrait of the first king, the time-traveling mirror,” she continued, listing them off while counting on her fingers. Yep, that was the exact same lineup I heard last time.

“Also, that history book probably mentions this, too, but... They say that the first king could see the future when he built the country,” Rokuko said.

“Future sight...? Hm, that would make sense if he looped back and had knowledge of the future.”

“Right. From our perspective, it feels like you’re just talking about the future.”

So wait, does that mean Daide’s first king was looping, too? From there he picked the best future, and founded Daide... That would actually make sense.

“Which means this looping might not actually be Leona’s magic?”

“It’s a possibility,” Rokuko said. In which case, the experiment Leona mentioned... might actually have been her experimenting with recreating the loop magic.

“Think it’d be a good idea to start researching the first king and any religious ceremonies he might have performed?”

“Uh-huh. Let’s go talk to the portrait of the first king that can talk. Nothing better than getting it straight from the source!”

“I mean, there’s no proof it’s the actual first king talking,” I replied. It was more than possible that some random ghost had attached itself to it.

Anyway, that was when Rokuko started to rub her legs together and fidget in place.

“Hm? Gotta pee?”

“No...! Listen, Keima. Since school is off on the weekend, want to go on a date?”

“A date? Like, you and me going somewhere alone?”

“Right, a date. Just you and me. I heard about a lot of date spots from my classmates.”

Oh, yeah, Rokuko invited me on a date in the first loop, too. I turned her down since it’d be too dangerous, though.

“Oh heck yeah, girl, a date!” Ichika explained. “Go on, lovebirds, I’ll hold down the fort! We’ll be fine with Wataru here! You good with this, Soto, Niku?”

“Um? But Ichika, I want to go, too!” Soto exclaimed.

“They won’t need guards?” Niku asked.

“Listen up you two. Mumble mumble mumble...” Ichika whispered something to Soto and Niku.

“...Oooh, right! I’ll stay home for sure!”

“...Understood. I will stay put here.”

“A’ight, it’s settled!”

Apparently it was settled. *Yeah, in retrospect, Ichika wasn’t here when Rokuko asked the first time. I wonder if she would’ve made the date happen then, too?*

Not to mention, this was different from the first loop where we didn’t know anything. Now I knew for sure Leona wouldn’t mess with any dates that took place on her specially made date spots. She would peek, but that was about it.

“So, Keima. You heard Ichika. It’s fine, right?”

“Ahhh, alright. Fine. But you have to keep the Divine Quilt on. Just to be safe.”

“Okay. I can make it into a tiny scarf or cape, so that works.”

The Divine Quilt would protect her from the most freak of accidents, and since I was using {Ultra Transformation} I could die once without issue. No matter what happened, we were safe.

With that decided, we dropped by Wataru’s room.

“Wataru. I’m gonna go on a date with Rokuko this weekend, could you look after Soto and the others for me?”

“Wait, just the two of you?”

“Since it’s a date, yeah. Don’t make it weird.”

“True. And I guess it’s fine, since you’ll be able to protect her no matter what happens. Okay, I accept.” Wataru nodded to himself.

Leaving Soto and the others with Wataru would put them under the protection of {Ultra Good Fortune}, which should keep them pretty safe. Bit late to be realizing this, but it might’ve been pretty risky for Soto, Niku, and I to go to the Buddhist Church alone way back when. We ended up being fine, though.

* * *

So yeah, the weekend came. Rokuko and I began our date.

“Let’s fill up first! They told me the best restaurants in the city,” Rokuko said, guiding me to the street with all the food stands. However, today we went to a proper cafe, not a food stand. The wooden tables and chairs gave it quite the atmosphere.

“Apparently the cakes here are super tasty. The sandwiches are good, too, which makes it a good spot for bringing boys, they said.”

“Neat. Though I’d rather have cake than a sandwich.”

“I’ll go with a sandwich, then. We can split and share.”

With that, Rokuko called over an employee and started ordering. Perhaps due to learning etiquette in class, she handled it pretty well. Honestly, she even looked pretty cool doing it.

“Since it’s a date, let’s have fun conversations. Keima, talk about something.”

“Hm? Uh, that’s kind of abrupt... How’s school, then?”

This was all so sudden, I ended up talking like a father who was speaking to his daughter for the first time in weeks.

“Eheh, tons of fun. I made friends other than just Mephy, you know.”

“Yeah. You’re surprisingly good at diplomacy. So, are those the friends that told you about this place?”

“That’s about right. Nice and fancy place, isn’t it?”

“What kind of things do you and your friends talk about, anyway? Just girl stuff?”

“Weeeell... Oh, food’s here.”

The waitress put the strawberry shortcake in front of Rokuko, then the egg sandwich in front of me. Once they poured tea and left, I swiftly swapped the plates.

“Let’s eat.”

“Uh-huh. But I think it’s best to chat a bit when eating this kind of thing.”

“Alright, let’s continue where we left off from, then. What do you all chat about?”

“More about food than you’d think. Like the best restaurants to visit. Visit this place since I’m investing in it, visit that place because you’ll want connections with the owner, and so on.”

That feels less like talking about food and more like noble-esque faction politics?

“Romance comes up a lot, too.”

“Ye olde who-likes-who.”

“Apparently a baron’s daughter, a former commoner, stole the hearts of the first prince and the entire student council, which is really bad since each of them are the eldest sons. Their houses are all in danger of collapsing. The first prince’s ex-fiancée is also apparently something of a prodigy, and is inventing all sorts of new sweets.”

Hm! That sure sounds like noble socializing! Also, that's Summer, isn't it?

"By the way, this store is apparently funded by the first prince's ex-fiancée. She used to be selfish and shallow, but all of a sudden it was like she became a totally different person."

"Oh yeah? Like their minds were swapped with someone else?"

That sounds pretty suspicious... Oh, wait, that's Koreha, the reincarnatee.

As I nodded, Rokuko held out the egg sandwich, bite marks pointed toward me. "Keima, you can try a bite. Open wide."

"You want to feed me? That sure is a date-y kind of thing to do... Wait."

This is definitely an indirect kiss, right? Or honestly, more like an indirect French kiss.

"...Aaaah?" Feeling a bit hesitant, I opened my mouth and bit into the sandwich. It was a normal egg sandwich with sharp lettuce. The mayonnaise and pepper helped to bring it together into something pretty good.

"What's wrong, Keima? Your face is red."

"I-It's nothing."

"Ooooh, oh. I get it. Good grief, we've already kissed and had a child, but you're still so innocent," Rokuko said. She grinned and bit into the teeth marks I had left on the sandwich. With red cheeks of her own.

"...Rokuko. Here, you can have some of my cake, too. Open wide."

I stabbed a fork into my cake and held it out to Rokuko.

"Nom!"

"Whoa. No hesitation, huh?"

She bit hard enough to take the fork, by which I mean it literally stayed in her mouth when she pulled her head back.

"Eheh, shyness is a weakness here. That was good. Here, have your fork back."

"...Er, well, alright. At least now I know how aggressive you're being here."

“You should be more aggressive with me too, Keima. C’mon, c’mon.”

“I’m just glad to see you enjoy yourself.”

I ate more cake with the fork Rokuko had put in her mouth. The mix of strawberries and sweet cream was as powerful of a combo as I remembered. I decided to buy some to bring back to Soto.

From there we spent about two casual hours in the cafe, with Rokuko talking about what she had heard at school and me talking about what I saw on guard duty.

Though I mean, well, you know. I spent most of that feeling pretty off, since we were just sticking around after finishing our food.

“Good grief, Keima, can you not calm down? What happened to all that confidence and laziness you always have?”

“How do I put this... In my mind, restaurants are places to eat in and get out, so it was hard to just sit around. I mean, you saw how many people there were, right? I feel like sticking around in popular restaurants like that is just kinda rude.”

“Well, I know how you feel. We run a restaurant of our own, so.”

“Yeah, the better the food is, the worse taking up space is,” I said. Though we could take as much space in our own restaurant as we wanted, since it was ours.

“Okay, next time I’ll ask for either a restaurant with terrible food, or at least a really obscure one,” Rokuko said, grabbing hold of my hand.

Holy cow, that was smooth! Rokuko is one fearsome girl!

“.....”

“Or not. C’mon, say something. Don’t just hold my hand then fall silent.”

“Wh-What’s the problem? Holding hands is normal on dates, totally normal,” Rokuko said, pursing her lips with red cheeks.

“Then keep talking. Otherwise, it’s just... really embarrassing.”

“F-Fine. Sooo, what were we talking about?”

Seemed like Rokuko wasn't keeping it completely cool, either.

From there we went to the street with a bunch of stores while talking. There were rows of stores with big glass show windows. Inside were mainly clothes, bags, and necklaces, plus a bunch of large appliance-esque magic tools that I could easily guess the purpose of. In this little bubble of Daide, it really did feel like I had returned to Japan. Aside from all the carriages and the lack of any black-haired people.

"This really is an impressive lineup, huh?" I said.

The easily recognizable electric appliances were the most impressive. The Hero Workshop sold dryers of their own, but the ones here looked mass produced and cheap. Though that did kind of take away some of the novelty.

"Want to buy them?"

"Nah, we don't need them. Especially not with Survival magic. More importantly, Rokuko. Want any accessories or anything? That feels kind of date-y."

"Mm? Okay, I'll take anything except a ring, then."

Rokuko already had a shining red ring on her left ring finger. It was a simple ring made fancy only by the orichalcum coating and big ruby on it.

"This ring you made me suits me better than any other, so what's the point in buying another? If we call the Beddhist holy symbol a necklace, maybe I'd like a hairpin or something?"

"...You know you may need to swap rings with me at some point, right?"

"That's different. Your Succubus ring doesn't count since it's a guard."

And so, I thought of an item to get her other than a ring.

"You think of something too, Keima. Something that'll look good on me!"

"Sure, but I wonder what's best..."

From there we spent plenty of time selecting a hairpin. That was easier on me than hanging around in a cafe all day.

From there, having enjoyed our date to our hearts' content, we found

ourselves atop a hill lit by the setting sun. It was a popular tourist spot since you could see all of Daide's capital city from it.

"Did you learn about this place at school, too?"

"Mhm. It's used all the time in popular romance novels, even. See?" Rokuko pointed, and I followed her finger to see other couples here as well. It certainly did seem to be a date spot.

"...By the way, Keima. It's a bit late for me to ask this, but did you go on a date with me in the first loop, too?"

"Hm? Nah. I didn't. But it's not 'cause I didn't want to, okay? I just thought it'd be dangerous."

"Of course. I know you love me, Keima."

"R-Right."

It was true, but kind of embarrassing for her to just say it like that.

"Keima. If we loop again, and I lose my memories, go on another date with me, okay?"

"Sure. I'll take you around instead, if that ever happens."

"Sounds like fun! Oh, not that I would be able to look forward to it if we loop," Rokuko said, then leaned against the railing. I followed after her.

"What a nice view."

"Yeah."

"...Keima, you know that dates like this always end with a dramatic kiss, right?"

"Er, w-well, I suppose..."

"Eheheh, don't worry. I know veeery well how indecisive you are," Rokuko said, cackling. Her face was red, even amid the orange of the evening sun. "But if you kiss me here, I might get jealous."

"Jealous? Why?"

"Jealous of the next me. She'll get to keep memories of the first time you

kissed me on your own,” Rokuko said, tilting her head up and stretching a bit.

Her face blocked the sun, getting up close to mine in the blink of an eye.
There was a soft sensation.



“So you can kiss me on your own once we’re out of the loop. Do it at a dramatic moment, one that I’ll never forget.”

“...Y-You don’t mind doing it yourself?”

“It’s fine! Aaah, now it’s going to be the past me who’s jealous. ‘Why did *you* get to go on a date and even kiss him?!’ Anyway... Look, the school’s so small from here! Isn’t the inn we’re staying at over there?!” Rokuko asked, putting on blatantly fake energy and leaning over the railings.

“Whoa there, be careful... I mean, you’ll be fine even if you fall, but still, don’t.”

“I’ll be fine if you keep holding my hand. Look, the sun’s about to set.”

I looked, and saw the red sun start hiding itself behind a hill. I watched it sink down with Rokuko’s hand in mine. And with that, I steeled my resolve to end the loop, so that Rokuko didn’t lose her memories of this.

Once the sun finished setting, the sky turned from red to the dark blue of the night.

“Oh, and after the sun sets, we’re supposed to link arms and walk under the street lights.”

“Makes sense. Now that you mention it, there’s even street lights here. The imperial capital has them, too, but still.”

Though naturally, the light came from magic tools, not LEDs or anything. If the city had less order, I’d expect that to increase crime rather than decrease it, but maybe not.

“In stories, muggers show up, and the hero protects the heroine.”

“Wait, we’re actually going to get attacked? Maybe we should go home early, then.”

“Well, there is an inn nearby. One targeted at couples.”

...What, is that like one of those inns?

“Well, you could just blast any muggers to death with your magic, so.”

“I’m not so sure.”

“We’ll be fine. Muggers here will be weaker than the average Demon Realm person.”

“Okay, when you put it like that, yeah, I’d blast the crap out of them.”

This country sure is more peaceful than the Demon Realm, at least on the surface. Though the Demon Realm is kind of a special case, and I don’t know what’s going on under the surface here.

And so, we linked arms and returned home beneath the street lights. We didn’t get attacked, but we did find Wataru and the others around with smug grins.

“...Lemme guess, you followed us?”

“Hahaha, nah, no way. We all just went out on our own and coincidentally ended up in the same places as you.”

And so, starting with Ichika who had probably introduced the plan to begin with, I smacked them all in the head. They stopped complaining because they were going to follow us from the start. Somehow, I didn’t notice them at all.

* * *

From there, we investigated the school’s seven mysteries and its ceremonies, both religious and not. As a result, we learned they didn’t really have any ceremonies, and they were almost all duds.

Hanako of the toilet was simply a stray cat being stealthily raised in the girls’ bathroom (with the cat’s name being Hanako), and the dancing skeleton specimen was just a Skeleton disguised to look like a normal human skeleton (he being a spy from the Demon Realm). The stairs that grow more steps at night were actually just a hidden path, which led to the back of the talking portrait, which was a peephole into a guest parlor. It was just a simple spying trick. The minstrel that could be heard in the night was the ghost of a choir student, which could be considered a big hit for the seven mysteries, but wasn’t relevant to us. We just left the ghost there since its singing didn’t hurt anyone.

From there, we learned the forbidden hall was a room in the dungeon, which just left our main objective, the time-traveling mirror.

The mirror was apparently past the furthest hall. Thus, we waited for the day of dungeon drills, which provided the rare opportunity to go into the school dungeon which contained the furthest hall. These were the last of the seven mysteries, and we wanted to explore them thoroughly.

I only noticed this after looking at the pamphlet Toi gave me, but this dungeon's not just at the center of the academy, it's at the center of the entire country of Daide. There's definitely something suspicious going on. Or rather, I really want there to be something suspicious going on.

We finally hit May 13th, the day of the dungeon drills. The second prince had scouted Soto once again, so we had once again promised to delve into the dungeon with him. The other members were likewise the same as Loop 1. And indeed, Summer was there, acting cool.

Wearing a bunny suit, for some reason.

No, but why a bunny suit? It's definitely a Succubus kind of thing to wear, but I don't know about the daughter of a baron wearing one. Koreha's literally keeping her distance out of embarrassment.

"Keima, Rokuko! Nice to see you again!"

"Y-Yeah. Hey."

"That's a pretty bold outfit... Why a bunny suit?" Rokuko asked.

"I decided to live more freely, and I'm starting with my clothes! Ahaha, truth is, this is actually a formal outfit that people of Daide wear to dance parties. Surprising, considering how lewd it is," Summer said, jumping to make her boobs and fluffy ears bounce. There was even a lighter (a flame-producing magic tool) wedged into her cleavage.

"Wait, really, Mephy?"

"Not in the empire, but I don't know about Daide. I say, Lady Koreha, which is it?"

"W-Well. Bunny suits are considered formal wear for dance parties, so it's fine, but... Nobody has actually worn them before..."

Incidentally, even on earth it was considered fine to wear bunny suits on TV, but not really in public. Leona adopting that for dance parties in this world was very much like her. She had worn a bunny suit herself during the Dungeon Battle with Core 564, so yeah.

“But Summer, putting your outfit aside, why are you attending dungeon drills but no other classes? Up until today, you had been skipping class to go wild... while achieving perfect grades on makeup exams, but in any case...”

“Weeeell, I figured if I didn’t show up you all wouldn’t have enough people,” Summer said. She must have based that on her memories of the last loop. She was pretty diligent.

Class began, and we met up with Soto and the others.

“Papa!” Soto cried, waving and running up to me. I caught her in my arms and patted her head. Niku bowed, keeping a maid-like distance. Behind them were the second prince and the twins. This time, Summer didn’t ask about my relationship with Soto.

“What, you’re Lady Soto’s father?!”

“Greetings, please give your daughter to us!”

Despite not having introduced ourselves yet, the twins went straight to asking for Soto. I seemed to recall them doing the same last time.

“Uh, Soto? Didn’t I tell you to get their names wrong on purpose this time?” I asked.

“I got them completely wrong, but it still ended up like this somehow,” she replied, glancing at Niku.

“...Indeed. She got them perfectly wrong,” Niku said. In other words, by getting them wrong with one hundred percent accuracy, they deduced she could tell them apart after all. If there was another loop, we would need to try getting them wrong based on some kind of randomness. Maybe just flip a coin before speaking to either of them.

Anyway, they viewed her being able to distinguish between them as the result of true love, and naturally moved right to trying to marry her. I decided to deal

with it the exact same way as last time. “Alright, but give it up if I can distinguish between the both of you. You’re Meter and you’re Lacie, right? Turn around and swap places as much as you want,” I said, and then easily distinguished between them through tags on the map.

“So? What was that about love?”

“A-Amazing...” “How did he do that...?”

“If you really want people to know how to tell you apart, tag yourself or something. Don’t make it hard on purpose then whine. What are you, little kids?” I asked, being a bit spiteful since this was the second time. That wasn’t right, really; I was comparing them to Niku and loli-form Rokuko, but they were actually elementary students. The definition of actual kids. “Er, sorry. You are still kids... or young, at least. Makes sense you’d be a bit selfish. Sorry, forget I said anything,” I finished, speaking in something of a deadpan. The twins looked at me with moved, sparkling eyes. Well... At least they were quiet now.

Anyway, we went straight into the dungeon, but I abandoned my guard duty immediately. I was here to investigate the bottom of the dungeon, so yeah.

I left guard duty to Wataru and stealthily left the party, then used 100 DP I had on hand to summon a bunch of rats. We weren’t in a Dungeon Battle, but they were still the best tools to use for exploring a dungeon. It was honestly a bit intimidating to see a swarm of rats up close like this, but as they were summoned through DP they were my loyal servants.

I sent them off to explore the dungeon, and watched as my map rapidly filled itself out. Times like this really reminded me how unfair Dungeon Masters truly were. A few rats got eaten by monsters, but I nevertheless found the staircase in the blink of an eye. At this rate, I could probably get back while Rokuko and the others were still doing their drills.

I started walking to the downwards staircase I had found. A few monsters popped up on the way, but they didn’t prove to be much of an obstacle. I either blasted them down with a single shot of magic, or intimidated them so much they fled instantly. I charged forward quickly, not fearing death since I had {Ultra Transformation} anyway. It helped that there were no traps whatsoever; before long, I was down to the next floor.

And so I silently conquered the dungeon just like that, until I came across an odd room on the seventh floor.

“The hell is this place...?”

There was a large mirror on the wall, and there were groaning magic circles on both the floor and ceiling with glowing lines. This was obviously not a normal room.

“Um, Keima? What are you doing here?” came a voice.

I felt the room temperature drop by two degrees. A sharp sense of tension shot through my back. I turned, and saw Leona in her nun outfit.

“You sure show up everywhere, huh, Leona?”

“For today alone, that’s my line,” Leona said, sounding like she hadn’t expected me to be here.

“What, you weren’t spying on us?”

“Not today, since I’m busy. As you can see,” she continued, pointing at the glowing magic circles.

“What are they, anyway?”

“The time-traveling magic circles left behind by Daide’s first king.”

My eyes widened. “In other words... If I break these magic circles, the looping will stop?”

“Fear not. I have already finished dissecting the circles. Their magic is in the palm of my hand. Today I am just here to, let’s say, dispose of some waste,” Leona said, reaching a hand out to the ceiling. The magic circle faded, no longer working.

“What about the mirror?”

“It connects to the king’s room. He was a genius, but he didn’t manage to turn back time itself, so the best he could do was use the mirror to communicate with his past self.”

Thus was the true form of the time-traveling mirror, apparently. It seemed investigating the seven mysteries had been a good idea.

“...Hm? But wait, why is the mirror in this dungeon then?”

“Simple. He, too, was a Dungeon Master. That was why he was able to connect to the past, even if only with his voice. He was one... or rather, fifty-some steps away from actually turning back time, but I managed to finish the work he left behind. Now the magic does indeed turn back time. Eheheh,” Leona said, casually answering my suspicions. “He was called a prophet and a fortune-teller back then. Indeed, he certainly was a genius at magic. He poured his life into creating... or rather, discovering, the ultimate magic. A true genius if there ever was one.”

“So if he was a Dungeon Master, that would make this his dungeon... Where’s the Core?”

“Well, this dungeon is a bit of an unusual case. Its Core is already dead. However, the dungeon hasn’t actually died yet.”

Before I could ask how that was, Leona continued.

“This dungeon is built firmly on top of a ley line... Well, to put it in terms you would understand, it’s a brain-dead vegetable that’s being barely kept alive on constant life support. Well, it’s yet another relic left behind by that genius. Still, it has no soul anymore.”

In short, the dungeon body and its functions alone remained. Apparently.

Leona stroked the floor’s circle, a bit sadly. It, too, lost its light and faded away.

“Okay, then. My business here’s all finished.”

The room remained lit with the soft light of a dungeon’s interior, even now with the magic circles both dead. Yet more proof the dungeon wasn’t dead yet.

“But why go out of your way to erase the circles if we’re going to loop back anyway? You must be erasing them every loop, right?”

“Think of it as a tiny memorial service. I used to know this Dungeon Core. Oh, and by the way, this is the only day of the year this room can be entered. Really, I’m impressed you made it this far. There aren’t any bosses, but even I think this dungeon has a pretty complex layout.”

I gave a vague smile, swallowing the urge to say a swarm of rats really simplified matters.

“By the way, Keima,” Leona said with a smile of her own. “You said all that to the heroine, but it certainly seems to me that you don’t want to loop yourself. You came here to stop the loop, no?”

She figured me out, huh? And she really was looking through Summer’s eyes, I guess.

I smiled despite the cold sweat running down my back.

“Is there something about this loop that dissatisfies you?”

“What, would you fix it if there were something?”

“Of course. I went out of my way to build this playbox, so I want to have plenty of fun with it. As you said yourself, there’s plenty of good food and fun places to go, on top of having infinite wealth and life. You can make up for mistakes no matter how many times you make them. What exactly doesn’t satisfy you?” Leona asked, tilting her head.

“The fact that nothing stays, I’d say.”

“Nothing stays?” Leona put a thoughtful finger on her chin. “Aaah! You’re worried about Rokuko’s memories, aren’t you? Okay, I’ll work on it.”

“You could change that?”

“Of course! As a result of my research, I even succeeded in getting a mere High Succubus to keep her memories as part of the loop. This is more than possible! Ah, how wonderful. Soon the world will be more than satisfying for you, Keima!” Leona exclaimed, clapping her hands.

I decided to hear Leona out here. If Rokuko kept her memories, this certainly wouldn’t be all bad.

“How will you do it?”

“First, allow me to reveal the secret to having memories capable of surviving the time traveling. Simply put... you need the divine protection of both the God of Darkness and the God of Light. You just need these two, on top of being inside Daide itself. Doesn’t a combo of Light and Dark seem incredibly strong?”

With those conditions, it certainly made sense that Leona, Soto, and I were keeping our memories.

“The original owner of this mirror could only send his voice back through time, since he only had the God of Darkness’s protection, but I improved it. Eheheh, mind if I brag? Surely not, surely not. Only one called the God of Chaos such as myself could have managed to improve it this far. Though it does help that it was a ritual predicated on using my functions, but... I dissected the destroyed magic circles in this dungeon and succeeded in directly making a loop, and began experimenting with how to make others loop as well. That only took fifty-three attempts to succeed. I had to inject someone with a mixture of Light and Darkness power to fulfill the previously stated conditions! Goodness, I never would have succeeded without the looping, either. Well, it’ll be a bit different this time since Rokuko is already a server of the God of Darkness, but if she’s lucky it’ll only take a small number of attempts!” Leona exclaimed, smiling.

“Fifty-three attempts? It’ll only take a small number, if she’s lucky?” I asked, repeating the points that caught my attention the most.

“Don’t worry, you have nothing to fear. After all, this is a time loop—if we keep trying until we succeed, then success is absolutely guaranteed!”

I felt my head spin at that. “And what happens if you fail?”

“Oh. Well, she’ll probably die or go insane? But since I’ll keep going, the failures will be lost to time regardless. It’s simple, like reloading a save until you dodge an attack with a 1% chance to dodge. There will be a bit of a waiting time, since the loop time is set, but... Well, we have plenty of time. What’s the problem?” Leona smiled, as if there was no problem at all.

I thought back to my date with Rokuko. Since she didn’t keep her memories, she had talked about herself as the “previous me” and the “next me.”

Rokuko was lucky, but judging by how Leona was acting as if failure was inevitable, it was highly likely she would screw it up on purpose. In which case, I absolutely couldn’t just nod and play along here. I would never abandon Rokuko, even if it was only once or twice in a hundred-plus loops.

“...That’s not a deal I’m about to make.”

“Oh, does it hurt your kind heart, Keima? Mm, mm. I understand how you feel. In that case, I’ll delete all memories of failed loops. Memory control is easy as pie. You seem a bit resistant to it, so you’ll need to willingly accept it, but in practice it will feel like winning in a single time. What a blissful world! Everyone will be happy! Aaah, as a nun myself, I’m so glad to have been blessed with the power to make everyone happy!”

As expected, Leona and I could never be friends. What she talked about certainly happened in games a lot, but this was reality.

...Oh, and really. There’s no guarantee that Leona’s telling the truth, or that the Rokuko mixed with Light or whatever would be the same Rokuko. If it ends up changing her into someone else that just looks the same, like Toi is to Niku, that would be game over then and there.

“...Sorry, but I’m not about to let you mess with Rokuko,” I said. The more I thought about it, the more bizarre it was that I had listened to Leona for even a second.

“Really? Well, I suppose you can hardly cheat on her freely if she’ll remember it all. Ahaha, very well. But feel free to bring this back up if you ever change your mind.”

“Hey, Leona. Want to make a bet?”

“Oh? What, a challenge? I’ll accept if it’s fun,” Leona said, her smile never faltering.

“I don’t know how exactly it works, but I’m going to break your loop. I win if I can break it. How’s that sound?” I asked.

Leona’s eyes widened with surprise, as if having been caught entirely off guard. This was a challenge she would have to accept regardless of whether it was fun or not.

“...Hm. You really don’t like this happy world, do you? Mm, weeeell, I can think about it,” Leona said. She fell into thought for about ten seconds, then answered. “Okay, but I’ll be defending it with absolutely everything I have, and if the loop completes you’ll have to be my pet as a punishment. Since I’m kindhearted, I’ll settle for having you once every two loops.”

“Eh, sure. Consider it me paying back the favor of you telling me all this,” I said, agreeing largely because it would keep Rokuko safe either way.

“Hey, I’ll even go so far as to erase your memory of the pet loops, if you want.”

“Like hell I would w— Wait. There aren’t any loops you’ve erased my memory of, are there?” I asked. I had the terrifying thought of me having lost already, only for my memories of that loop to be deleted.

“Eheheh.”

“C’mon, answer.”

“I’ll leave that to your imagination... Ah, er, fine, this is your first time looping. Well, excluding all the times you didn’t come to Daide.”

“Good, then. My strategy would change if you already knew all the cards up my sleeves.”

“Eheheh. But there’s not much in this for you right now, is there? Is there anything else you want as a bonus? Like, becoming my pet! I can add a bonus reward if you win within five loops, easy. I’ll do AAANYTHING you want,” Leona said with a provocative grin.

“...Well, Haku did ask me to bring you back to her if I could.”

“Hm? Mm, but that’s not what *you* want, is it? Good grief, you have a cute girl like me saying she’ll do ANYTHING. Isn’t there only one answer here? This is why people call you a virgin. Oh, that was just a guess. Am I right?”

Yes. Dammit. My monsters and slaves make fun of me for it.

“Okay, if I win, let me punch you.”

“Aw, you’d punch such a cute girl? Keima, do you have a ryona fetish?” Leona giggled.

Ryona...? Now that’s some obscure sex terminology. I’m just gonna pretend I didn’t hear anything.

“Okay, then. I’ll let you punch me. Where will it be? My stomach? Face? I recommend my butt or boobs. Or could it be... You meant that in a sexy way?

Squeeee♪”

“Not at all. It’ll be a full-force power punch. Still good?”

“Of course. That’s fine with me,” Leona said with a nod.

And so my battle with Leona was settled. To be honest, I felt like I had been a bit too hasty. If I hadn’t said anything, losing would have had no consequence, and Leona would have just looped me back without any punishment. However, I felt obligated to challenge her like this. I had no intention of letting the loop keep going. Leona getting her way just annoyed me on some deep level.

Alright, time to practice punching at full force. Think I’ll go with the face.

“Okay, out of respect for you being willing to challenge me, I’ll tell you something nice,” Leona said, narrowing her eyes and smiling. “The time-traveling magic is veeery delicate. The restrictions are so precise it has to happen at a specific time, at a specific place, and only once every ten years when the stars align. On top of that, it uses such an enormous amount of mana that even I end up drained multiple times over. It’s only possible at all by using the divine Authority of the gods. Thus, I don’t have any second copies waiting to force the loop to happen. Fear not, even I struggle quite a bit to make magic on this level happen.”

“Whoa, not that I’m complaining, but should you really be telling me that much?”

“Why, of course! I mean, you need all the help you can get, right? It wouldn’t be much of a challenge if I didn’t at least share this much... I need to make the game fun, y’know?” Leona said, grinning.

“Still, for something with restrictions that harsh, you sure are using it a lot, aren’t you?”

“I mean, think about it. If time rewinds, then the stars go back to their old positions, too. The place doesn’t change, either. The only thing that leaves is the mana. Naturally, you don’t get the mana back when time goes back, but...” Leona paused to lift up the skirt of her nun outfit. “Hey, what’re you doing?! Pervert! Frea— Oh.”

A garter belt, with black lace underwear... Could it be?

“Did you notice? Indeed, this is the Divine Underwear. Ahaha, you know how all of the Divine Bedding gives increased regeneration, right? The regen speed is based on how much you’re missing, so I can use as much magic as I want no matter how many loops there are. Teehee!”



After giving me a very lengthy look at her underwear, she finally lowered her skirt back down. She blushed a bit.

“Did that turn you on? My own heart’s pounding, to be honest. I haven’t felt like this since I was seventeen!”

“How many years ago was that, even...?”

“Eheheh, consider that god humor. Oh, and if you escape the loop, I don’t mind giving them to you as a reward,” Leona said smugly. I really wanted to punch her in the face. Leona did a spin for seemingly no reason whatsoever, making her skirt flutter up a bit.

“Let the game begin, then. In the end, will you be able to find the time and place where I perform the ritual? The only hint you have is... it happens between now and that party. That, and it’s somewhere in Daide! Aaah, what a hopeless situation! But surely, if you just keep looping, you’ll find it one day. Don’t worry, as long as you don’t give up, victory is guaranteed!” Leona said, laughing with amusement. “I’m looking forward to you keeping your promise to be my pet... {Teleportation}.”

With that, Leona vanished.

* * *

“So yeah, we’re fighting Leona now,” I said, explaining the circumstances to Rokuko and the others after returning to the inn, following barely having made it back to the group before dungeon drills ended.

“I never thought you’d make such a pointless, risky gamble, Keima... Was she mind-controlling you or something?” Rokuko asked.

“No way, girl. Master’s always been like this, y’know? If someone threatened you, he’d even punch the crap out of a god. The only thing controlling him here is love,” Ichika said.

“Oh, um, r-really? I see,” Rokuko said, blushing as Ichika elbowed her. Now that I thought about it, why had I made this challenge without even thinking about it for a second...? To Leona, no less.

“...N-No comment.”

“Silence is confirmation, Masteeer!”

Ichikaaa! Shut up!

“Anyway, how are we going to find the time and place of the ritual?” Rokuko asked.

“I have an idea for that,” I said, looking at Niku. I had just spent some DP on a bunch of paper, which she had spread out on the floor for me.

“Is this how you wanted them?” she asked.

“Yeah. I want you to... Hold on, {Create Golem}. I want you to stamp the paper with this. Like this,” I said, covering the bottom of the large, paper-sized stamp with ink before pressing it down on the paper. When lifted, the paper below had a grid of lines on it.

“Understood,” Niku said. I handed her the stamp, and Soto shot her hand up.

“Papa, I’ll help, too!”

“Okay, I’ll make another, then. {Create Golem}... Here you go,” I said, handing Soto an identical stamp.

“What even is that? A melon roll stamp?” Rokuko asked.

“It’s just a grid,” I replied. Though lattice grids did look like the surface of melon rolls. “Ichika, put the dates and times into the stamped papers. From tomorrow until the party on the 31st.”

“You got it. One paper per hour, huh? With twenty-four hours, and today being the 13th... That’s over four hundred sheets. Kinda annoying, but I’ll handle it. Just a bit of number punching,” Ichika said, getting to work.

“What are you going to use this for?” Rokuko asked.

“I’ll pair this up with a map, and... have Wataru help. Probably have Emmymephy help, too, since she doesn’t seem to be doing anything.”

“What do you need them for? They’re good for a safe zone, but not for investigating, right?” Rokuko asked, tilting her head. However, Wataru was the key to my plan here.

“Rokuko, take out a map of Daide for me. Even a tourist pamphlet will do.”

“Kaaay.” Rokuko bought a map with DP. It was the perfect size. I just had to stamp it, and... done.

“Master, what next?” Niku asked.

“Holy cow, that was fast.”

“I hurried. Eheh.”

“Me, too! Eheheheeeh!”

Niku and Soto puffed out their chests with pride. I gave them both congratulatory headpats.

“I’m only on day three, dudes... Niku, give your girl some help. You can start on the 31st and work back.”

“Very well,” Niku said, going over to help Ichika with her tail wagging.

“So, what do you need Wataru’s help with?”

“To do something only he can do, naturally. It’d probably be faster just to show you.”

After waiting for Niku and the others to finish, I asked for Wataru’s help with narrowing down the ceremonial hall and the time it would be taking place.

“Heeey, Wataru, you’re in here, right?”

I pushed into our neighboring room with a map and two ten-sided dice. Rokuko was off getting Emmymephy.

“Yup, come on in. Oh, by the way, Keima. The twins got worried when you wandered off. I made excuses for you, so y’know, you’re welcome, buddy!”

“Thanks, pal. Your efforts were rewarded; I found some pretty important clues.”

“Oh yeah? Wh... Oh, guess I can’t ask. Good grief, to think the day would come that my {Ultra Good Fortune} was this unhelpful...” Wataru sighed. Fear not, my friend. I have good news for you.

“About that. There’s actually something I want your help with. It’s something only you can do, so yeah.”

“Oh? I can be useful? Gladly, then!”

“Yup, yup. Now then... Go ahead and roll these dice for about an entire day.”

“...Er?” Wataru blinked.

“I brought Mephy.”

“I say, what do you need my help with?!”

“Masteeer, we finished the papeeer.”

Emmymephy, Rokuko, Ichika, Niku, and Soto all came in at once, with Niku having the graph paper from before. I spread out the map on the table.

“Thanks for the help, Princess Mephy. I’ll need you to help without knowing why just like before.”

“Done and done!”

I handed the graph paper to Emmymephy. It was a pretty thick stack of 432 sheets of paper; eighteen days’ worth, with each day having twenty-four sheets.

“Er, so, what exactly should I be doing?” Wataru asked.

“I want you to roll these dice. We have a date, time, and a map with a marked grid... If you combine all these elements, each roll of the dice will give you a time and a place. Still with me?”

Wataru nodded.

“This is the important part. I want you to swear this to me. You are not to go to the place at the time marked by the dice if you can help it.”

“Wha?”

“Repeat after me. You are not to go to the place at the time marked by the dice if you can help it. Okay?”

“I-I won’t go to the place at the time marked by the dice if I can help it!”

“Good. Now, I’ll explain while you do it. Roll the dice.”

Wataru rolled the two ten-sided dice a few times. He got a 17 and a 20. 2 over 3. Add +13 for today’s date, and...

“Let’s see here. That’s 8PM on the 30th, and since it’s 2 over 3... That marks the church on the map,” Wataru said.

“Yup. Princess Mephy, note that down. The sheets are separated by hour, make sure not to mix them up.”

“Understood! Ah, I say, I just need to fill in these boxes, correct?”

The sheet of paper was for the 12th’s 8PM. There were as many boxes as there were on the map.

“First, draw a tiny vertical line, followed by three more lines next to it in a row. Then for the fifth line, cross it diagonally,” I said. It was the American way of counting to five with marks.

“Hold on a second. I say, how many times are we doing this?”

“Ideally about ten thousand. The more numbers the better for stats like this.”

“Ten thousand?! I-I say, consider it done! You may trust me! I say!” Emmymephy faltered, but nonetheless stood her ground.

“Er, okay. Well... I guess I really will be rolling dice all day,” Wataru said with a sigh, having agreed to help too quickly. It seemed he understood what I wanted to do here.

Indeed. This was dowsing using his {Ultra Good Fortune}.

In the past, we had used Wataru with a stick to find Rokuko and the others fast. At the time it was predicated on us already knowing the answer, but I had developed it forward to brute force the answer with {Ultra Good Fortune} investigation.

This method would reveal the highly dangerous locations that Wataru needed to avoid at all costs. His {Ultra Good Fortune} would manipulate the dice to land on places he needed to avoid.

I had made the rule “do not go there if you can help it” rather than “do not go there under any circumstances” in order to measure the danger. Not going there under any circumstances would likely lead to it marking places Wataru wouldn’t need to go on the day of anyway.

Leona had said I had a 100% chance of succeeding as long as I didn’t give up,

but with this I could narrow down the dangerous places with 99% accuracy. All thanks to Wataru.

“Aaah, I get it. Hence the map and graph paper. Good luck, Mephy,” Rokuko said.

“Rokuko... I say, I’ll do my best!”

“Okay, we’ll be making other plans elsewhere. Good luck, Wataru.”

“...Yeaaah. Oh, Mephy. 22nd, 1PM, 8 over 3.”

Yep, yep, keep on making data. Good luck, Wataru, and also Emmymephy. Heck, I’ll even have Ichika and Niku help out later if you want. All of this is resting on your shoulders.

Anyway, it was time for us to think of a way to block the time-traveling magic itself.

* * *

“Wouldn’t it be best to just preemptively destroy the place where the ritual can supposedly only be held?” Rokuko asked.

“That might work if she needs some tools. But if it’s just the place that’s important, she could probably use magic to clean up whatever mess we make.”

“Like Core 6 cleaned up the coliseum in an instant? It’s possible. Should we break her tools, then?”

“...Would Leona not be able to just instantly create new ones?” Niku asked.

“The more I hear about this, the more of a pain in the butt it sounds like...” Ichika groaned.

“Papa! What if we stick her in my dungeon and stop time to ruin the schedule she has?!”

“Not a bad idea, but she’ll probably be part of the half that doesn’t freeze, since she’s the God of Chaos and on a level beyond humanity. It’d be faster to just close the {Storage} and cut her off from everything else.”

We were talking things out, but I really couldn’t imagine a single reality in which we beat Leona.

“...Gaaaah! This is going nowhere! At this rate, how about we just smash ourselves against her without a plan and see what happens?! Keima can be a pet for one loop, it’s fine!”

“That’s basically just giving up and accepting a loss... Wait, Rokuko, you wouldn’t mind me being Leona’s pet?”

“I know you’ll come back to me in the end! I have faith!”

This feels odd... Almost like I can’t tell whether she actually has faith in me or not...

“Anyway, Master, you sure Leona isn’t spying on this little meeting, too?” Ichika asked.

“Yeah, pretty sure. Should be safe to say that we’re still in range of Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} right here.”

Ichika cocked her head. “What, she can’t spy on us when Wataru’s around?”

“I’m curious about that myself.”

It didn’t seem like Leona had turned this entire country into her dungeon territory. Daide still belonged to that dead-yet-alive dungeon. And subsequently, Leona generally viewed the loop through Summer’s perspective.

The exceptions would be the day of the dungeon drills, and the night party. Those seemed to be the only days Leona stopped looking through Summer’s eyes, and the only days Wataru could meet Summer. Both this loop and the previous loop pointed to that.

In short, {Ultra Good Fortune} was working to make sure Leona didn’t notice Wataru. It even went so far as to burn down the inn we were staying at to avoid her seeing him. That made it highly likely that Leona didn’t even know he was here, and that we could avoid her just by sticking close to Wataru.

“In short, we’re fine as long as Summer or Leona herself aren’t here. I’m guessing the results of Wataru’s dowsing will end up showing where Leona and Summer are.”

“Huh, so she can’t mess with him if she doesn’t even know he exists... {Ultra Good Fortune} is some pretty scary stuff,” Ichika muttered. In retrospect, the

thought of mentioning Wataru to Leona hadn't even occurred to me. That was probably {Ultra Good Fortune}'s influence, too.

"In short, it should be a safe bet Leona doesn't know Wataru's here. Or like, if she did, we wouldn't need to do this guessing game, and we could just find her through luck. She probably sees him as a generic bodyguard at best."

"So basically, he's her blind spot," Ichika concluded.

"Yup. And therein lies our chance for victory."

But if you flipped that around, you could say we had no chance of victory if we didn't exploit this. And in turn, our greatest chance of winning this was in the first loop, where Leona had her guard down and didn't expect us to know where the ritual hall was. We needed to prepare as best we could before challenging her.

"But still, we're fighting Leona, right? We'll have to tackle this like we need to kill a god if we want to win," Rokuko said.

"Yaaaah. She is the God of Chaos, so."

"Papa. The God of Chaos is a god that bends even time and has all power in the palm of their hand, right? I learned about it in theology class!" Soto exclaimed.

Theology, huh? Elementary students are learning theology?

That was when Niku, who had been deep in thought, suddenly looked up and lifted her hand. "Master. We have only one chance of victory."

"You have an idea?"

"Yes—our only hope is a surprise attack from the front."

Okay, you lost me. Attacking from the front so you don't get noticed? That seems contradictory.

From there, we continued our heated debate. It was certainly heated, but we couldn't come up with any plans which guaranteed victory. In the end, I just decided to try them all, from best to worst. Worst case scenario, I would just loop.

...And Wataru's gonna be working his butt off. First comes figuring out the time and place for the ritual.

Leona's Perspective

And so it became May 30th, the day before the night party. To reveal the answer in advance, this was the day where the ritual was held.

From what Leona had seen through Summer's perspective, Keima seemingly hadn't been able to find her, and so she stopped worrying about him. And now, she was in the ritual hall. Or not, actually. She was in the basement of the Beddhist church, which had a soft red carpet for resting her knees on when praying.

Leona was offering a prayer in this room, where she knelt alone. Just who would Leona the God of Chaos pray to? Was she perhaps just thinking of what to eat for dinner that night? These were questions none had the answer to. Perhaps she was looking through the eyes of her subordinates to enjoy the outside world.

"Lady Leona. May I have a moment?" came a voice. The door opened, and Toi approached Leona.

"Oh? You mustn't leave your post, Toi."

"My apologies, Lady Leona. But I have a request for you, if I may," Toi said, with a deadly serious expression.

"A request...? Ahaha, certainly. Ask for anything you like."

"I would like to participate in the ritual as well. Seeing Keima has made me interested in learning what kind of ritual it is, exactly."

"Oh my, how rare. However, I can't tell you anything about the ritual," Leona said with a laugh. "It wouldn't be fun if I just told you, know? You may search for the ritual hall yourself, I won't stop you."

"...Isn't there anything I can do?"

"Nope, nooope." Leona patted Toi's head. "Still, to think you would come ask me that yourself. Honestly, how did you even find me here? I don't believe I

told you about this place.”

“Well. I simply asked for a black-haired, red-eyed nun. They told me without any difficulty. And this room was unlocked.”

“Oh, really now? Well, I suppose I wasn’t particularly trying to hide that I was here, at least. What better place to hide a nun than a church, as they say.”

Leona brought her face closer to Toi’s flat, expressionless face.

A sharp slap ran out. Leona had slapped away a knife thrust toward her neck. Toi dropped her silver knife onto the red carpet, her hand numb from the blow.

“My my, that’s a bit much for a prank... Don’t you think so, Niku?”

“Tch... You saw through it,” Toi... or rather, Niku said, clicking her tongue.

“I mean, obviously. Did you think I wouldn’t?”

The Toi that Leona knew wouldn’t leave her post. She wouldn’t make requests, either. After all, a toy did not need such independent thoughts. Leona knew she had raised her better. Though if Toi actually had been interested somehow, she would have been willing to bring her to the ritual.

“And so here we are, alone together again. Could you be attempting to seduce me, perhaps?”

“...I won’t lose this time,” Niku said, pulling out a magic knife from her {Storage}. She was trembling just a bit.

“You’re so lively it’s adorable. By the way, have you grown at all since the last time I saw you?” Leona asked with a bright smile. Niku had indeed not grown in the least since the day Leona kidnapped her. Her small frame made it easy to slip into futons, but it also troubled her, since it meant she had a shorter reach and less strength than she would have liked as Keima’s blade.

“...Did you do something to me?” Niku asked.

“I mean, if a loli grows up, she’s not a loli anymore. I made sure you could stay a cute, adorable loli forever, for your sake. Keima is still showering you with love, no?”

“Yes, thanks to... you...!” Niku grunted, swinging with all of her hate. The speed of her attack seemed fast even to Leona. However, it was something like

a baseball she was ready to catch with a mitt. It wouldn't do much damage if it did hit, but it would hurt a bit, so she dodged it anyway.

"That's my grandchild for you. That would have chopped off just about anyone's head. But too bad, you're fighting me."

"You could dodge that?"

"Again, did you think I couldn't? A weak attack like that would never hit me, obviously." Leona raised her right hand and produced an unremarkable bronze sword out of thin air. It was a cheap-looking sword that clearly lacked any magical enchantments whatsoever. The blade was worn, too, and didn't seem capable of cutting anything.

"I considered using a random stick for fun, but I'll be nice and use a sword."

"I will destroy that smug face of yours."

"Do you think you can?"

Leona lazily swung her sword down. Niku jumped to the side, and the wall behind her ruptured as an invisible force shattered the stone.

"So even that was easy for you to dodge, hm? You really *are* my grandchild."

"...The quality of your weapon means nothing, then?"

"I have a pretty high attack stat. Ahahaha." Leona gave yet more lazy swings, this time vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. With each swing of the bronze sword, Niku dodged, and the wall behind her was carved with a permanent wound.

But Niku was steadily closing the distance between them as she dodged. Seeing that, Leona clenched her left hand, and lifted it up to chest height.

"Flick!"

"Ngh!"

The instant Leona opened her hand, Niku's head shot up as an invisible finger flicked her forehead. The force of the blow jerked her head back and froze her movements. Leona used that opening to swing her sword. Niku narrowly managed to swallow the pain and leap to the side, avoiding the invisible slash.

“With that posture, you won’t be able to dodge the next blow, just saying.”

“Ngh?!” Niku prepared herself to be hit. And yet, the blow never came.

“Why...?”

“I mean, you’re Keima’s dakimakura, no? He’d get mad if I just up and broke you. Ahaha, but don’t worry. Even if I do kill you by accident, I can just fix you, so don’t hold back. I still perfectly remember the body composition of the Toi series, and worst case scenario, I can revive you from your soul. Oh, but with that in mind, maybe I don’t need to hold back at all?”

“...I won’t hold back, either.”

“Oh my. That makes it sound like you weren’t going all out before now. What, will you show me how far you’ve grown?”

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt}!”

“Lame, {Ice Bolt}.”

Leona instantly blocked Niku’s chanted magic with a spell of her own, only she didn’t need to chant. It wasn’t even a special trick, as far as Leona was concerned. She could have even gone completely chantless and cut the spell name if she wanted to.

“Don’t tell me using magic is you going all out. Your magic stats aren’t anything special, even if they are better than an average person’s. That’s why you’re a failure without even a serial number... Though it looks like your physical stats at least meet the par I set.”

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bolt}!”

“Again... Wait, where are you even shooting those?”

“Shoot forth, ice, and pierce mine enemies—{Ice Bo—!”

“Whoa?! Careful now.”

Leona blocked Niku’s slash and punched her, sending her flying. She had leapt into an attack midway through her third chant. That ended the chant and stopped the spell from firing, but that had caught Leona off guard just enough for her to instinctively shoot out her left fist and punch Niku’s stomach.

“Guh...!” Niku slammed against the wall with a loud thunk. Leona blinked, then began preparing Restoration magic.

“Not bad. You made me actually throw a hard punch... Oh?”

However, Niku was unscathed. An attack that should have burst every one of her internal organs hardly felt like it did anything.

“That equipment... The Divine Quilt, I see. Where did you get that, I wonder? You sure are being treated well.”

“Cough...! Yes, Rokuko lent it to me. Ngh, cough!”

It was the Divine Quilt that had been made by the God of Darkness. Niku had slipped it under her clothes to defend from outside attacks. However, Leona’s attack had pierced through it and dealt some damage regardless.

“.....”

“You seem confused, though it is hard to tell. Well, you see, that’s just a normal quilt to a god. Our divine attacks will go through it a bit. If not, nobody could have peeled off the sleeping creator god’s blankets.”

“...That is a sin in Beddhism, is it not?”

“It is, I suppose. But my main religion is the Church of Chaos, so it doesn’t matter. Its god says to just do whatever you want, and why, I’m that god!”

Leona threw her sword. Niku dodged it by the skin of her teeth. However, the sword twisted to pierce the ceiling, at which point it dropped lightning that made the stone floor explode. Niku was knocked back within the quilt’s protection, before eventually hitting the ground and rolling to a stop.

“Did a god’s lightning stun you? Ahaha. I wonder if I should go calling myself the God of Lightning, too.”

It was magical lightning that defied the laws of physics. Niku was stunned and unable to move. Her being undamaged was either thanks to the Divine Quilt, or Leona holding back.

“Now, what’s your next move? That stonewall quilt of yours doesn’t seem to be doing very much.”

“...Ngh!”

Leona cast Restoration magic to unstun Niku. It was harmless, and thus slipped through the defenses to heal her. And then, immediately after, Niku dashed out of the room without hesitating for a moment.

“...Hm. Well, whatever.”

Leona decided to just let her shamelessly run away. She could sense that Niku had left the church.

“I surely hope she isn’t thinking she can just tail me from here,” Leona mused. She, naturally, had {Teleportation}. There was no need for her to go outside or walk to her destination. Leona wouldn’t make it that easy for at least another ten or twenty loops.

Still, if they had managed to find her location in the church on the first loop, she probably wouldn’t need to lessen the difficulty for them to find the actual location on their own in a few more loops. With that in mind, Leona first used {Teleportation} to a completely random location before using it again to her actual destination.

And with that, she arrived at the ritual hall.

It was a room made of stone about the size of a gymnasium; in truth, it was a magic laboratory within the castle of Daide, the symbol of Daide as a whole. Tindalos, the fake old commander of the mage corps, did his magical research here as he pleased. The floor tiles had magic circles engraved in them to improve their magical resistance, and were thus immensely resistant to magical effects from within. Naturally, the stones were strong on their own as well, and physical blows would have to be pretty strong to scratch them. The idea was that no matter what happened inside it, the outside wouldn’t know.

Leona had selected this room as the ritual hall simply so nobody would bother her. Honestly, it was too obvious of a location to really be considered hidden, and no one could be blamed for thinking she had just been lazy. But she hadn’t been planning to hide it in the first place. She only made it a secret because Keima wanted to stop the loop and antagonizing him was funny. That was it.

As far as she was concerned, he would probably guess it was here if he had a

good instinct for these kinds of things. Though he would have to learn the room existed in the first place before he could do that.

“...Hm?”

Leona suddenly sensed something vaguely off. She stopped walking, and took a half step to the left.

Instantly, a beam of light shot through where Leona had been from behind. The aim was perfect, and judging by the pulsing mana discharged left in the air, it was pretty strong—enough to vaporize a normal person in an instant. If that had hit her head-on, even Leona would have become breathless from the pain.

The first shot was followed by beam after beam of follow-up attacks. Each was as strong as the first one had been, and Leona didn't recognize the spell.

“This is...” Leona paused, forming a barrier without a chant. It would only last a few seconds when made so haphazardly, but that was enough time for Leona to turn around, see who was shooting, and beam a smile.

“Good job finding this place, Keima! You have my praise!”

“...That wasn't enough to take you down, huh? This is gonna be pretty rough.”

There stood Keima, grimacing in sharp contrast to Leona's grin.

Keima's Perspective (5/14, The First Day of the Investigation)

“Look at the 30th. The danger suddenly shifts to the castle,” I said, predicting the location of the ritual hall based on the data Wataru formed of where he shouldn't go (after 15,000 rolls).

There were two threads that remained strong and consistent through the data: Leona and Summer. One thread started where Summer left in the morning and returned there later, while the other generally stayed within the Beddhist church at all times. It was easy to guess that was Leona.

On top of that, on the night before the party, Leona's thread suddenly disappeared and moved to the castle for a few hours.

Thus, I prepared new maps to iron things out further: blown-up maps of the castle and the church. They were as detailed as I could get them, but I got the feeling we'd only need three thousand rolls to narrow things down.

I went to Wataru's room, where I found him and Emmymephy slumped on the floor like good friends who had just formed a deep bond through adversity.

"Ngh, I say, I cannot believe that took fifteen thousand rolls. I never want to see dice again..."

"Same, I never thought rolling dice would be such hard labor... It probably wouldn't have taken us days to finish if you hadn't ironed out the process to only take three seconds each time, Princess Mephy."

"Sorry about that, you two! Anyway, I want more data on the church and castle. I've split them into fifteen sections for you!" I said. The two of them shot me angry glares that seemed to say, "Bitch, really?"

"Don't worry, we have the date and time ironed out already. You'll only need to do about three thousand rolls."

"...Why is it, Princess Mephy, that I feel saved by that rather than insulted?"

"I say, what a coincidence, Wataru. I was just feeling the same thing... Wait, what?! What is this map?! Castle blueprints are highly guarded state secrets!"

I had bought a bird with DP, had it fly up, and then drew the maps myself while looking at the footage. *Though... On second thought, couldn't I have just drawn the contours of the castle? The map I'm giving them doesn't need to be that detailed... Oh well, this might help {Ultra Good Fortune} give more accurate results, so it's fine.*

"Uh... I know a guy. It wasn't easy to get, so I'm counting on you both to make use of it."

"Ngh, fine. I say, Wataru, let's get this done!"

"Right. Let's finish this!"

...And yeah, thanks to Wataru and Emmymephy's efforts, I ended up narrowing Leona's location down to how many meters above ground she was at five minute intervals. They had my endless gratitude.

Leona's Perspective (5/30, The Day Before the Party)

Leona licked her lips, like a carnivore before her prey. She was like an animal when it came to Keima.

"I didn't feel an ounce of killing intent before that attack. You might be better suited to being an assassin than you think."

"Don't be dumb, I didn't have killing intent because I didn't think for a second that kind of attack would kill you. And I was right, wasn't I?"

"My, my! You have so much trust in me!" Leona exclaimed, rejoicing to a blatantly fake degree. She was teasing him.

"Why'd you bother dodging? At least let one hit you."

"Mm. I just kind of felt like it?" Leona suggested. There was no other answer, since indeed, she had just kind of felt like dodging. "Anyway, how did you find this place? For you to have snuck into the castle... You must not just be guessing here."

"Let's call that a business secret. Men with a lot of secrets are more cool and attractive, no?"

"My, my, my. Very well, I won't ask, then. What's important is the fact that you're here, Keima. That said... I have a ritual to perform. Sorry, but I don't have time to play with you."

"Stopping that is... why I'm here."

"Of course. If you'll give me a moment, I'll summon some back up. {Call Slave}," Leona chanted, and a magic circle appeared beside her. Above it appeared a dog-eared, brown-skinned, loli maid... Toi.

"I have answered your summons, Lady Leona. Toi Tindalos has arrived, at your service," Toi said with a bow.

"Toi. I am going to perform the ritual; stop him. You can buy that much time, no?"

"You may count on me. I am your perfect toy." Toi puffed out her chest with pride at being entrusted with work. Keima couldn't deny that even that felt

identical to Niku.

“...Just you, huh? Do you think you can beat me on your own?”

“Say that after you win, not before. Rather, I am the one who must question whether you think you can beat me on *your* own. Recall that I am Chaos’s toy. Unlike your beloved failure, I am perfect and complete.”

“Nah. Naturally, I’ve got backup,” Keima said, opening his {Storage}. He then took out a dog-headed halfling from it... a Kobold. It had iron swords in both hands.

“A mob monster?”

“Yup. This one feels the closest. Alright... I’ll leave Toi to you.”

“Woof. (Understood.)”

Toi found that phrasing curious. Closest to what?

An instant later, the Kobold lunged, attacking Toi without saying anything. She swung her iron swords in a tight posture.

“Ngh...! You’re fairly fast!”

The clinking of metal filled the air. Toi blocked both swords with combat knives she got from seemingly nowhere. She had managed to block the swings thanks to being Toi, but if this Kobold showed up in a normal dungeon, it would have instantly killed just about any C-Rank adventurer. It was clearly far above the level of a normal mob monster.

“Let us see how well you do when attacked, mob!”

Toi swung her combat knives. The clanking of metal hitting metal filled the air. The Kobold deftly blocked each strike with its iron blades, sending sparks flying through the air. Clink, clink, clink! Right, left, left, down, up. The combat knives flew at speeds beyond human comprehension, but the Kobold blocked every swing.

“Hm? This Kobold is oddly resilient.”

“Woof. (So you are Toi, then?)”

“...Yes? What of it?”

Leona and Keima could understand the dog's barking with their translation skill. Toi, meanwhile, had a reasonable grasp of dog language. Since she, too, was a dog beastkin.

"Woof. (I am Niku.)"

"Hmmm...? I see. So you are the failure. Looking quite pathetic, you are." Toi launched an especially hard swing, and the Kobold—Niku—blocked it easily. Indeed. The Kobold was being possessed by Niku, and manipulated from afar.

"Niku, you take care of her. I'll stop Leona."

"Woof. (Roger.)"

"You would abandon the body you received from Lady Leona to inhabit that of a monster? Why would you choose such a frail body on purpose...? It boggles the mind. But I suppose it will be dead soon enough. Go, {Lightning Blade}."

Lightning shot through Toi's knife. It was a blade skill for enchanting a weapon with electricity. Being hit with that stunned the Kobold and created an opening. Toi did not miss this.

"I... win?!"

—But Toi's combat knife was blocked by another Kobold.

"Oh, Toi. I forgot to mention, but since Kobolds are mob monsters, I've got tons of them. Have fun."

Keima had taken out extra Kobolds from {Storage}. As the ten Kobolds surrounded her, Toi's mouth twitched just a bit.

Keima's Perspective

I surrounded Toi with Kobolds while Niku was distracting her. And so...

"Woof? (Oh, did you think it was me?)"

"Woof. (Too bad, this one was me; Niku.)"

"Aaah, so confusing! How dare you?! You're just a failure!"

"Woof. (You must be a true embarrassment if even a failure is making you

struggle this much.)”

“Shut up! Just die!”

However, Niku (a Kobold) blocked the knife. She held her ground with the blade pushing her back, then attacked with another Kobold. Toi dodged, attacked, then got attacked by yet another Kobold.

“Woof. (This time, this one is me.)”

“Hmph, not bad, failure! To think you would make up for weakness with numbers!”

Niku attacked Toi while swapping through the Kobolds. Toi was forced to turn while fighting, and Niku used that opportunity to attack with different Kobolds from both sides. Only one of them had Niku inside.

“Woof. (You’re a small-fry pup that can’t even beat Kobolds.)”

“How dare you! You are such a failure you didn’t even manage to stay in the trash properly!”

“Woof woof. (Small-fry pup, sore loser, all bark no bite.)”

Indeed, Niku (as the Kobolds) was in such an advantageous position she even had the leeway to taunt Toi. Each Kobold was a small fry individually, far weaker than Toi. They only managed to fight on an almost-equal level once possessed by Niku. But that level was equal only when there was a single one of them. Niku had transformed the throng of Kobolds into a deadly whole by rapidly swapping between them. The strong foe in front of Toi would suddenly appear behind her when she was unable to move. And then they would attack from both sides! It was impossible for Toi to tell which Kobold was Niku. They all looked identical, and even if she distinguished between them, Niku would have swapped between them in the next second.

It was a strategy that exploited her new nature as a Dungeon Master to its fullest!

“Ngh, I thought I would overwhelm you with knives, but it seems I must use area of effect magic instea—”

“Woooooof!”

“Hyah?! Ngh, interrupting my chant with a loud scream! Pathetic! The kind of cowardly strategy I would expect from a failure!”

...Incidentally, not all of the other Kobolds were complete small fry. Ichika and Rokuko were controlling two from Soto’s master room, and while they weren’t on Niku’s level, that still meant there were two extra strong Kobolds in the throng. And even if some got killed, Soto had over a thousand ready to deploy. With a dog beastkin, Niku, as her Master, Soto could summon one Kobold for only 15 DP. Even for the swords, I had gone wild and made her about two thousand swords using {Stone Pyre (Iron)}.

So yeah. Sorry, Toi. This isn’t a one-on-one with Niku, or even a one-on-ten. Seems like you blundered here, huh? Not a chance in hell you win alone.

“Leona, looks like we win this dogfight.”

“Hm. Seems so indeed... Not bad, Keima,” Leona said, smiling. “Still, why do you get on my case for all the things I do when you’re wasting so many Kobolds’ lives? I mean, that’s a very Japanese thing to do, hypocrisy hell yeah, but still.”

“Hm? Eh, well... I only noticed this after Ichika said it, but the truth is, I don’t give a damn what you do.”

“...Oh?”

I didn’t feel any hesitation for exploiting the monsters I made specifically to be exploited. I used Golems for materials all day. With that in mind, it definitely would have been hypocritical for someone like me to criticize Leona.

“We just don’t share tastes, and normally I would just grimace at most after hearing about your bullshit. If you did these things to people I don’t know in places I don’t know about, I wouldn’t care in the least. It wouldn’t have anything to do with me. But once you start playing your games on my territory, things change. That’s all there is to it. After all, I’m a Dungeon Master. What’s odd about a Dungeon Master protecting their territory?”

Leona rubbed her chin, nodding. “I see... Guess I can’t blame you, then!”

“Right? If you’re saying we should all do what we want, as the God of Chaos no less, I can do whatever I want here, yeah?”

“Yup, yup. Of course! The world is a playground. We’re free to do whatever we want!”

“...So yeah. Sorry, but I’m gonna stop your oh-so-fun looping here. Not for any grand reason; it’s just in my way.”

“Go ahead, feel free. But of course, I’m also free to fight back!” Leona exclaimed, a flood of differently sized magic circles appearing with her at their center. “Allow me to explain. Some of these magic circles are dummies, some are for offensive spells, but... Indeed, this is the Ultra magic, the time-traveling {Load}. Think you can stop it?”

In an instant, a wave of missiles launched from the endless magic circles, resulting in what looked entirely like a bullet hell shooting game. It was exactly the kind of flashy fireworks one would want to signal the start of a fight.

“Oh, you are wearing the Divine Quilt, right? You’ll likely survive just barely, then. Maybe.”

“Uh.”

I had heard about it from Niku, but apparently Leona’s attacks were capable of slipping through the Divine Quilt. *Curse you, Chaos. Can’t you hold back just a little?*

Leona’s Perspective

“{Summon Gargoyle}!”

Keima avoided the roaring fire, ice bullets, and electricity beams Leona shot from her tiny magic circles by summoning Gargoyles to use as shields. Naturally, spells launched with the intent of hitting the Divine Quilt were too much for mere stone to bear, and each spell destroyed a group of Gargoyles. Also, judging by how he was summoning multiple Gargoyles from each {Summon Gargoyle}, Leona deduced he was likely multi-chanting.

“Gotten better, haven’t we?”

“Don’t have time to talk! Eat shit!”

Keima didn’t just guard; he shot torrents of light toward her as well. The light

erased a magic circle that could be considered a Fireball Spawner. Leona rewrote it... Apparently his spell erased magic circles.

“I’m not familiar with that spell. Is it from the God of Light...? Where did you find it?”

“Ahahaha, that’s a business secret!”

As far as she could tell, it was a basic and therefore mana-efficient spell that didn’t require much in the way of incantations. She could have used {Ultra Identification} to research it if she heard the chant or spell name, but Keima made sure to cast these alone in silence. That said, it was likely a spell without an element. One where you caused your mana to go on a rampage and then throw it in the general direction of where you wanted to cause chaos. If so, it was on the verge of not even being a spell at all.

“...Is that one of the God of Light’s secret weapons? Good grief, you sure are pushing yourself,” Leona muttered. The rampaging mana would forcibly activate any magic circle it touched, and if they were half made nothing would happen except a breakdown of said magic circle. Leona guarded the attacks with barriers, taking care to make sure it hit any circle except the {Load} circle.

“{Summon Gargoyle}, then {Stone Pyre}!” Keima chanted, stating nothing more than the spell name. Stone pyres shot out of the ground of the ritual hall. She swung her hands, breaking them down while casting more spells.

“{Stone Pyre}! {Stone Pyre}! {Summon Gargoyle}!”

These weren’t fake magic circles like the ones she had tricked Aidy with before. They could be repaired if damaged slightly, but the more he interfered with the circles, the slower they took to finish.

“...Hm, this is a bit more troublesome than I expected,” Leona mused. She deflected the pyres with chantless barriers, and smashed the Gargoyles with bullets of air.

The troublesome thing was that the pyres came from places Keima wasn’t touching directly, and that even included them shooting out of the Gargoyles’ heads. That was surprising enough to actually catch her off guard. The only saving grace was that they hadn’t shot out of their crotches.

“...I see, you’re activating long-form spells through the Gargoyles,” Leona said. She had figured it out after seeing it enough times. {Stone Pyre} was only supposed to activate on ground within reaching range, but by slowing the activation down and having Gargoyles carry the spell Keima could activate it from further away. On top of that, he could stretch out the flow of mana to connect it with the floor.

“You truly are clever, Keima.”

Leona was impressed, and praise from the God of Chaos wasn’t something to take lightly. He should be proud. Even if he hadn’t been able to make her move a single step.

“Still, you sure like to use Earth magic, don’t you?”

“Yeah, ’cause it leaves behind wreckage. It’s easier to dodge with this stuff around,” Keima said. But Leona saw his actual goal.

“You’re trying to destroy the ritual hall?”

Keima’s magic had already destroyed quite a few of the magic-resistant stone tiles. The beam of light in particular was deadly. It demolished walls and gouged out the floor. Even the magic-resistant magic circles were broken down and scattered mercilessly.

He was even stealthily putting the stone tiles into his {Storage}.

“So you noticed, huh?”

“Yup. Sorry, but it’s all pointless. The magic circles on the ground don’t have anything to do with the ceremony. {Save and Load} is purely within my hands.”

“...So, what about the stone tiles with the magic circles on them?”

“Those are just for increasing magic resistance. They’re useful to have in labs, since they can block minor magic damage completely.”

“So there’s not much point bringing them back, huh?” Keima said jokingly, and Leona broke into a smile without thinking.

“...{Pitfall}.”

At Keima’s word, a hole opened up beneath Leona’s feet. But she didn’t fall. It

was like she was standing on an invisible floor.

“Too bad, I formed a barrier. I saw the mana crawling toward my feet, so... Sorry for not falling, hmm?”

“C’mon, it’s a pitfall. How can you not fall in it? You’re a human.”

“Um. I’m a god, remember?”

Keima furrowed his brows, as if only just remembering that fact.

“Woof! (Master.)”

And then came a voice, or rather, a bark that changed the battle. A Kobold ran up to Keima.

“Heya, Niku. Where’s Toi?”

“Woof. (I tied her up over there.)” The Kobold pointed to where Toi was bound up and being put into {Storage} by a throng of Kobolds.

“Let... go of me, you inferior beast! Do you think a failure has the right to do this to me?!”

“Wooooof. (So that makes you a weak, weak pup even lesser than a beast.)”

“Ngggh...! O red star, I call u—nggh!”

“Woof. (No magic chanting.)”

One couldn’t use magic with their mouth blocked. The mana she had been pouring into the spell dissipated. It was all Toi could do to groan in frustration.

“Ahaha, incredible. To think mere Kobolds could be used so effectively. I might have to apologize for calling you a failure,” Leona said.

“Woof! (You’re next!)” barked the Niku-Kobold while dodging fireballs. She seemed to be getting close, so Leona activated {Earth Bind} without a chant. The Kobold was stuck in place, then had its head blown off. The next Niku-Kobold approached.

“...{Call Slave},” Leona chanted while blocking their magic attacks, causing Toi to disappear from between the Kobolds and reappear by Leona. The Kobolds surged to recapture her, but Leona formed a barrier to stop them.

“...F-Forgive me, Lady Leona. They captured me by surprise.”

Toi bowed her head almost to the ground. Even her maid outfit was in tatters, covered in bite wounds from the Kobolds.

“Stop, stop. I don’t care,” Leona said, snapping her fingers to heal Toi. But her face was emotionless, and her eyes had a look of bored disappointment. It was the gaze of someone looking at a useless toy. Of disappointment.

“Th-Thank you very much, Lady Leona,” Toi said, despite shaking and paling at the sight of Leona’s expression. When Leona sighed, she jerked, and her tail drooped.

“...Seems like Niku was better than you. If this were the tortoise and the hare, you’d be the hare. The hare loses, you know. You’re a dog, but a hare. How about you try hopping, huh?”

“Y... Yes. Hop, hop, hop!”

Toi put her fingers behind her head like a rabbit and tried hopping a bit. She was being forced to imitate a rabbit while magic attacks rained down on Keima’s group.

“Look like you’re having more fun!”

“Hop! Hop! Eheheh, eheheheh!”

Toi forced a smile and hopped like a rabbit while tears of frustration streamed from the corners of her eyes. Her beloved master was forcing her to do this while holding off Keima with a single spare hand. She really was useless. She really wasn’t needed, she realized, which made the tears keep flowing.

“Why are you crying? This is fun. Aren’t you having fun?”

“Eehehe, yes, so much fun! Thank you for playing with me, hop!”

She hated being useless. She hated that she had to act like a rabbit, despite being a dog. But if she was told to have fun, she would. She was happy to be used as a toy, like her namesake. A mix of emotions stormed within Toi’s heart.

“Aah, that’s good. That’s the expression. So cute, it sends shivers down my spine. Mm. In honor of that expression, I’ll give you one more chance.”

“Ah...! Y-Yes, th-this time for sure, this time for sure I’ll be useful! I will!” Toi exclaimed, bowing her head once again.

“Thanks for waiting, Keima.”

“I’m not waiting, and you killed three platoons of Kobolds without even looking, y’know. Could you at least hold back when talking to someone?”

“Aaah, sorry. My body just kind of moved on its own while my mind was elsewhere. Anyway... Would you mind playing with Toi again? It’s almost time for the main part of the magic. Oh, right. And let me add this into the fray... {Call Pet}.” A sizable magic circle appeared over Toi’s head.

“Wha?” Toi said, which was all she got out before a black liquid began raining down on her. “L-Lady Leona?! Buhwuhguh!”

“Master, it’s been so long! Hm? What’s with this dog? Don’t tell me, it’s another pet!”

The black liquid jiggled, swallowing Toi up. Toi flailed within it.

“Hiii, it really has been a while. But that’s technically my granddaughter, Toi.”

“Granddaughter! Master’s granddaughter! Sorry!”

The black liquid spat Toi out, and morphed into the shape of a wolf.

And that was Leona’s pet slime—Rin.

Keima’s Perspective

{Call Pet}. Judging by the name, it was a spell for summoning one’s pet. And what appeared was a black Slime. I remembered it. It was the slime that I had punished with a load of salt after it messed with our dungeon.

“...Rin?”

“Huh? Who’re you?”

It was unmistakably the deadly Slime that had occupied our dungeon for a bit.

“Oh my, Keima, you know my cute little Rin?” Leona asked, stroking Rin’s head. Rin leaned against her, practically purring with delight. To think she was

the master... the super strong master that Rin had talked about.

I mean, makes sense they'd call her strong. She's friggin' Chaos.

"I get it now. They're a Slime, so you got Rin from Slarin, the Dra*on Qu*st Slime. Very clever."

"I know, right?! They used to be so round and cute back in the day. In these kinds of games, there's a certain beauty to raising a Slime to be your strongest monster ally, no? So I mixed things up with them, evolved them, and then... they got this strong!" Leona exclaimed, filled with pride.

"I see... Well, I know how you feel. There definitely is beauty in raising Slimes."

"Exactly. I knew you would understand."

Leona was proud. Rin was self-assured. Toi was frustrated.

"Hyah."

I shot {Element Bursts} from both hands in a surprise attack, hoping to hit Leona and Rin unaware. Leona flicked hers aside, and Rin exploded on contact. The black juices scattered, then gathered back together to form a wolf again.

Tch, no damage, huh?

"Eugh, guh, guuuh... Where did that come from?! You trying to kill me?!"

"Wait, it actually did damage?"

Rin bared their teeth, growling. But they left it at that, since they didn't have orders from Leona to attack.

"There there, good pet, Rin. Go and help Toi now. Okay?"

"Right! I'll help your grand-pup! Hey, grand-pup!"

"...My name is Toi. Now, let us go! I cannot shame myself any further... Help me, black Slime! We shall defeat them together!"

Toi and Rin began their charge together. A Niku-Kobold blocked Toi's attack, but Rin chopped its head right off.

"I was just getting hungry! And I just got blown up, so this is perfect. Nom

nom nom.”

“Hey! Don’t eat, fight, Slime!”

“Healing, food, comes first! Eating to fight is common sense! Also, I’ll help after eating!”

Rin just ignored the next Niku-Kobold to eat the first Kobold’s corpse. They were as much of a glutton as ever. Which reminded me of something...

“Hey, Rin, sorry about that. Let me make it up with this.”

“Mm?”

I took out a pure-white plate I bought with DP.

“Th-That’s! The tasty thing...! I can have it?!”

“Yeah. Consider it an apology from me. By the way, you promised to let anyone who offers you white plates go, right? Are you gonna break your promise?”

“Ngh! I, I...”

Rin froze, debating whether to take the white plate or not. I wiggled it around, and their face followed it back and forth.

“Catch...!”

“Woooooof!”

I threw it like a Frisbee, and Rin ran off to chase it. Toi, now alone, watched them go with a dropped jaw.

“...Niku-Kobold, go!”

“Woof. (Yes.)”

“Um? Um?”

With Rin having left to go eat the plate, Toi was surrounded by twenty Kobolds, who captured her much more efficiently than before.

“YOU STUPID SLIIIIIME!”

Toi raged as she was carried into {Storage} by the Kobolds. I was starting to feel a little bad for her.

Rin came back after finishing eating.

“Overlooking you, and saving grand-pup, are two different things! There’s no... problem...! Mm? Where did... grand-pup... go?”

“I just brought her inside. You better hurry if you want to help her.”

“What?! She left me behind?! Just wait!”

With that, Rin jumped into {Storage} on their own. I... closed {Storage}. Time inside of it stopped. I wasn’t sure if Rin counted as a divine being since they were Leona’s pet, but they wouldn’t be able to leave {Storage} regardless. Soto could just make a room for them and lock them inside later.

“...Alright. Leona, I’ve taken out your pawns!”

“Sigh... I suppose they were just a slime in the end.”

Leona, having seen all that from start to finish, naturally gave me an exasperated look.

Leona’s Perspective

Rin was unexpectedly useless... or rather, Keima already knew exactly how to control them, so they had been disposed of far faster than planned. Leona had messed up by purposely training them wrong as a joke, since they were just so cute when they were dumb.

Leona sighed, while blocking Keima’s next wave of attacks with a barrier. How many times had she sighed already? As the boss of this operation, incompetent lackeys were technically her responsibility.

“I see I need to train Rin’s smarts a bit more. It’s my fault for letting them wander around for the past some years. Toi is a waste of space as well. She doesn’t have enough creative spirit. I suppose it is a common trap for those with talent...”

Leona could have summoned them both back with magic, but she elected not to. At the very least, she would leave them be for the rest of this loop.

“Oh, do you want Toi, Keima? If you raised Niku that far, surely you could

make Toi into something worthwhile, too.”

“Sure, but my fee will be you ending this loop.”

“Woof. (We don’t want her.)”

“Oh right, that was what we were fighting about. That’s another issue entirely,” Leona said, joking. “But, well... This was all an act. I’ll just be satisfied with the fact they bought a little time. In truth, I already finished by the time I summoned Rin.”

“...What?”

Indeed. Leona had already formed the necessary magic circle for the ritual. The magic circles swirling around her disappeared one by one. All that was left was activating {Load}, and then closing it in a time-stopping barrier. The loop would occur once the barrier was broken.

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. Despite how it may look, I take things pretty seriously and always arrive to appointments early. I activated my evil plan five minutes ago. It’s like basic stuff for me.”

“Hyaaaah!” Keima shot out an explosion of mana in something of a surprise attack. The air around Keima contorted, and countless beams of light shot towards Leona and the magic circle. They hit, and exploded.

“Aha♪! Aren’t you a little ashamed about attempting surprise attacks like this?”

However, Leona had already formed a barrier—and not a hasty one, but a strong one made over a lengthy period of time. It blocked even a Gatling gun—esque barrage of blows. There was nothing the Niku-Kobold could do.

“Ngh, you really blocked it?! C’mon, this is all the firepower I’ve got!”

“Honestly, you’re the scary one here, Keima. That destroyed half of my thousand-layer barrier in just a few seconds.”

It had only been a few years since Keima came to this world as a Hero. And yet, his power was already reaching that of Leona, who had spent five hundred years researching the world to her heart’s content after abandoning her morals.

“Okay, added another thousand layers.”

“That’s not r... Wait, whoa!”

“Woof! (Master, this is...!)”

She then put a barrier around Keima and the others as well. One that had 131,072 layers. Even Keima would take a lot of time to break through it.

“Just sit quietly with that Kobold and watch.”

That secured her victory. It was hardly any effort at all.

“I ended up taking this a bit seriously, since my pet and grandchild were just that incompetent, but normally I might’ve even let you win here... Oh, do you remember our promise, Keima?” Leona asked, looking over Keima from head to toe while licking her lips.

“The one where I could punch you?”

“Eheheh. That was if you won. But in the next loop, I’ll make you my pet and give you loots of love, don’t worry.”

She prepared the necessary barrier for activating the spell. With that, she just had to cast the time-traveling spell {Load}. No matter how grand of a spell it was, she had already cast it dozens of times. Her body knew it by heart. And she could sense she had enough mana to activate the spell.

Leona knew she had won.

But the spell failed.

“...What?”

Leona blinked with surprise. It failed, and yet the enormous store of mana she had saved for it nonetheless drained out of her... Some of the leaking mana went back to her, recovering her stores slightly.

“Ngh, ah... Why? How?”

Leona panicked a bit. The circle had been perfect. She searched her memories for any possible error, one by one. And then she found it.

“What...?! My rule over time wasn’t strong enough...?”

Indeed. Her authority, her power for controlling time. Her power as a god. It hadn't been enough, by just the tiniest little bit. It was a slight enough gap that she probably would have been fine if she had cast the spell with all her mana, but she had spent it in the fight, and now that she had lost almost all of it, there was no trying again.

...There just wasn't enough time to recover that much mana. At this rate, she wouldn't be able to make it in time for the ritual.

"Hmm... Judging by that reaction, seems like our plan worked, huh?" someone said. Keima.

"Did you do this, Keima?"

"Sorry, Leona, but yeah. It was me."

Leona looked at Keima in his barrier prison, and saw him smiling with relief.

Keima's Perspective

"Sorry, Leona, but yeah. It was me."

"...What in the world did you do?"

Apparently a plan we had been working on elsewhere had worked. Seemed safe to spill the beans now.

"Honestly, it was a gamble on whether it would work at all. You mentioned you needed the Authority of the gods to make it work, so I gave some of the time power to Beddhism's god. Remember when you told me about how to kill the gods? 'Steal their authority,' I believe you said? Glad to see it actually worked a bit, Chaos."

"Beddhism's God? But Beddhism doesn't have a—"

"Oh, it does. Indeed... The goddess that manipulates time and space, Sototemporarily the God of Time!"

"...!"

Indeed. I had made a god for Beddhism, the religion without a god.

"I believe I had written in the script that Beddhism is a religion by the people,

for the people,” Leona said.

“I just had to spread a little myth: when you get in bed, night turns to morning. This is because the God of Time is stealing your time. It’s because of her that it becomes morning without you realizing it.”

I called her God of Time on purpose to deal with that Authority stuff, but she wasn’t worshiped. She was more like a sprite that would show up in fairy tales.

“When did you spread that myth...?”

“When you weren’t looking. Surprising, huh?”

Indeed. Soto had worked with Wataru to spread news that she was a god born of Beddhism without Leona noticing. And she had actually demonstrated her powers by boldly using her {Storage} dungeon and stopping time, slowing it down, *etc.*

“Y’know, we used that holy symbol you gave us, too. I can’t believe it actually made people listen to anything we said. Was it brainwashing? It was honestly kind of terrifying.”

The red holy symbol had really done work. It made the Beddhist disciples believe us, spread the news, and speed things along. With the approval of Wataru the Hero, the executor for the Pope of Beddhism.

It was a safe place, but also a place people would gather. We only had two weeks to make it happen, but it was good to see it actually worked. And you know, the fact Leona didn’t hear about it despite us spreading it like wildfire, well...

...It sure was lucky!

We had exploited luck as far as it could possibly go. This was a bad gamble we didn’t even know would work in the first place. But, well, the heavens were on our side!

“It was a myth about a god that steals time. Perfect for stealing your time-controlling powers, don’t you think?”

“Heh, heheheh, hahahahaha! Not bad, not bad at all! That’s right, that’s how you kill gods! Good on you for remembering, Keima!” Leona exclaimed, cackling

with joy. “Since I’m locked inside Daide with the loop, Daide is my world right now. It’s only natural my Authority would get stolen if I didn’t doubt my place in the world. Aaah... Good grief. This spell really is way too precise, and needs way too perfect conditions to work. At this point, it would take all I have just to send some words back to a specific point. But the mirror to send those words isn’t even nearby. Ahaha... Now, I can’t even influence the past to change the future. In short...”

Leona paused and faced me. Then, she gave a peaceful smile without any malice, and continued.

“I admit it. I lose.”

In other words, we had won.

“You can sell me, fuck me, or do whatever,” Leona said.

“...Doesn’t that phrase go ‘you can cook me, boil me, or do whatever’?”

That heroine Succubus said the same thing. You taught her that, didn’t you? C’mon.

Epilogue

The ritual hall was in tatters. Leona accepted her defeat. It was our victory.

“Alright, time to figure out what to do with you. Aside from selling you out to Haku, which is a done deal.”

“Oh, you’re actually going to sell me out to her? Well, that’s fine with me, since Haku’s a cutie.”

Haku had actually just said, “Bring her to me if you can,” but close enough. Also, was it just me, or was Leona being way too casual about losing?

“You seem to be taking this well.”

“I mean, I was going to lose eventually, that was the whole point. I didn’t think I would lose on the first loop though,” she said with a shrug. Apparently the loop in Daide really was just a way to kill time and nothing more to Leona. Or perhaps she had already completed her other objective, and didn’t really care if the loop ended nothing.

Thinking about that made a rush of anger swell within me. Our lives were on the line here, and she barely cared?

Thus, I decided to use the right I had earned as the victor.

“...Alriiight. I think I’m gonna redeem that one free punch now.”

“You’re actually going to do it? Well, okay, I guess. It was a promise.” The barriers between us vanished. “I’ll get rid of the barriers, too, just for you. Here, go ahead.”

Leona looked at me, smiling, not even attempting to get into a defensive pose.

“You sure seem pretty relaxed for someone about to be punched.”

“Noooo, noooo. It’s just your imagination. I’m definitely not thinking that my defense stat is stupidly high regardless of the barriers and that even your hardest punch would be like a tiny tickle, nooo, not at all. In fact, I’m more

worried about whether the bones of your fist might shatter,” Leona said, her smile turning into a nasty grin. Jesus Christ. Alright, I’m going all out.

I took out something from my chest pocket.

“Hey, Leona. Do you recognize what this is?”

“That’s... Um, my underwear? Wh-What? When did you... Mm?” Leona patted herself down to check, and felt that she had her underwear. But I didn’t miss the one moment where she let her guard down, and punched her as hard as I could. My fist hit her face with bone-shattering force. I went ahead and shot out an {Elemental Burst} from my fist at the same time.

“GHGUGH?!”

...That was a solid blow. I felt a painful crack in her face, and my own hand hurt like hell. Her defense wasn’t just for show. But neither was my attack power. She was rolling around on the ground in pain. Good. It was a real hit.

Leona stood up, blinking in pain and holding her nose.

“...Ngggh! Aaah, I can’t believe you would punch a girl in the face with ladies’ underwear wrapped around your hand. That’s not very gentleman-like, Keima... Nnn, ngh, that really hurt...”

“But male and female equality is very Japanese-like, isn’t it? Ohoho.”

I knew for sure now that Leona was a god, since we had successfully stolen some of her Authority. I similarly knew for sure that she would never die from normal punches or spells. My punch was made with the confidence she would survive.

Leona’s hand shone with a soft light, and the bruise on her face vanished without a trace.

“Whew. That sent sparks in my eyes. How many hundreds of years has it been since I took this much damage... I’m pretty sure you broke my perfect nose. Is it bleeding?”

“It’s fine. Want me to punch it again?”

“Next time I’ll put up a barrier, since that really hurt,” Leona said, with a tone of actual annoyance. Heh heh. Good thing I put in time practicing air-punching.

“...By the way, was that underwear a replica? It was pretty well made.”

“Pretty much. I had the idea to use this to create an opening and mess up your magic, but, well... I didn’t find the time to do it.”

And its time must have run out, since the underwear I got from Soto’s {Teensy Reproduction} vanished. Oh? When did Soto eat this underwear, you ask? Well, the truth is, it was the Divine Underwear I got from using my {Ultra Transformation}. Soto swallowed me as the panties whole, then once I was in her stomach, Niku pulled me out to a dungeon room using dungeon functions. And it worked.

I figured her {Teensy Reproduction} didn’t need to dissolve the food since she reproduced Niku’s socks instantly, but I never thought that we’d be able to copy the Divine Underwear I made with {Ultra Transformation}. The underwear’s power didn’t get recreated with {Ultra Transformation}, but...

“For you to make such a detailed replica, you must have stared pretty hard at my underwear, huh?”

“...I can do this with a mere glance.”

“So you loved them so much they were burned into your memory from just a glance! In that case, as a special reward, I’ll give you my freshly peeled-off underwear. It’s okay, you can cry with joy, I won’t judge.”

“I mean, I am happy, but not in the way you’re implying, so I feel kind of conflicted about this.”

Taking Leona’s already-used underwear is kind of uncomfortable, but they’re still the Divine Underwear. Better to have them than not. Yeah. Eh... They’re still warm.

“Okay then, I’m going to honor our little deal and go see Haku. Bye bye. {Call Pet}.”

A magic circle appeared, from which a wolf-shaped black Slime slid out. It was Rin, who I had stuck in my {Storage}.

“Erk?! Where is, Master’s, granddaughter?”

“Rin, forget about that. Make a saddle, so I can ride you like I used to.”

“Ooh! Master! Yes! Alright! Yes!”

Rin’s back morphed, forming a chair shape. It even had reins on it. To think a Slime could be that deft.

Wait, hold on a second.

“Hold it, what about Tindalos?! What about the reincarnates?!”

“I don’t really care about them anymore. Do what you want. Ask Toi for the details.”

“That’s your job! Clean up your mess before you go!”

“If you insist, I’ll wipe out the entire country to tie up every possible loose end.”

“Never mind, I’ll just ask Toi!”

What a dangerous psycho. She should be called the God of Destruction, not Chaos.

“You’re so nice, Keima. They’re just humans, you know.”

“I’m still a human, too. Also, write down a note or something so Toi will listen to me. Uh, pen, paper...”

“Here, here. {Ultra Alchemy}, {Ultra Alchemy}. To Toi. Listen to Keima’s orders. Okay, done. Here you are.”

As I looked around, she turned some of the rubble on the ground to a red stone, which then turned into a scroll which she wrote the letter on. She tied it up with a string, then tossed it my way.

“Okay, I’m off to Haku. Hi ho, Silver!”

“Silver...? I’m Rin.”

And with that, the two of them raced off to the empire.

...Oh, can I use the mail system again? I should probably send a report to Haku. Doesn’t matter if Leona sees us giving a report that she’s on her way. I can’t really do much if Leona blocks it again anyway.

* * *

And so we were freed from Leona's loop. Peace returned to Daide... maybe. I wasn't sure. Either way, I returned to the inn.

"Good work, Keima," Rokuko said as she and the others left Soto's {Storage} dungeon.

"Whew. That was exhausting. Can't believe the Divine Quilt wasn't even enough to block her attacks completely."

"Good thing we went through with Niku's surprise attack."

Our strategy this time had been simple: do everything that seemed like it might work somehow. Though naturally, we didn't have time to execute every single strategy we came up with. This was the only surprise attack on Leona's ritual hall that we'd ever have, even after loops.

"Good work out there, my dude. But man, that was one oddball strategy. Wataru was, like, hella useful this time."

"Yeah, he was definitely the MVP here... Think I'll reward him with Neruneh's socks once we get back."

"No way, he's not you or Soto. At least give him her underwear, Master."

Without time to test all the options, I decided to use luck to determine which strategy to use. Indeed... we used {Ultra Good Fortune} again. We wrote each strategy onto different sheets of paper which we put into tubes, then had Wataru select one, without knowing what they were. Since he didn't know what they were, we could even use strategies involving dungeon secrets.

Unbelievably, he ended up going like, "Okay, then this one, this one, this one, (etc.)," picking multiple at once. Thanks to that, he and everyone else ended up super busy.

"I worked really hard. Eheheh," Niku said.

"You sure did. But are you alright after dying in Kobolds so many times?"

"I'm fine. Eheheh."

When we checked the strategies Wataru picked, there were a ton of them we combined into one: "Attack Leona in the church before the ritual," "Niku disguising herself as Toi and launching a surprise attack," "Attacking her with

the Divine Quilt equipped,” “Attack Leona at the ritual hall,” “Attack from the front,” “Attack while possessing monsters.” Niku had her hands exceedingly full with all the combat, but she had pushed through for us. I would be giving her an extra fancy hamburger as a reward.

“We did it, papa! Show me the actual panties worn by a god!”

“...Don’t eat them, alright? Seems like they’re past the point that Hero skills can recreate them.”

“Okaaay.”

Wataru’s {Ultra Good Fortune} also selected a strategy nobody wrote, that went like “Soto,” “Steals,” “Time,” “God,” “Powers.” Apparently a bunch of half-written notes got mixed together and accidentally put into one tube... That was really pushing good luck, if you asked me. {Ultra Good Fortune} was undoubtedly at work there, likely because it was absolutely essential to victory. Explains why the empire’s fortune-telling section was so scary.

I formulated a more detailed plan from that concept, and had Wataru and Soto spread the truth of “The God of Time and Space, Sototemporarily.” The proof of her divinity she displayed using her {Storage} dungeon was, well... We had told Wataru that it was all a fraud, but it didn’t seem like he entirely believed it. Might be a good idea to say she inherited it from us and we have special powers of our own, or something.

Either way, in order to face a titan of an opponent like the God of Chaos, we needed Wataru’s inhuman luck and the power of dungeons for sure. That alone was set in stone as a fact.

“Really though, it’s a bit late to be mentioning this, but {Ultra Good Fortune} might have destroyed all of Daide if necessary, wouldn’t it?” Rokuko asked.

“If so, we would’ve had no choice but to loop. But we won, so we don’t need to worry about it.”

“Keima, you can hardly criticize Leona, huh? Aren’t you a bit harsh with strangers?”

Even Rokuko was saying that now. But, well, she had seen my answer to Leona when watching from the {Storage} dungeon’s Master Room.

There came a knock at the door.

“Keima, you coming back means it’s all over, right? I’d like to know what’s going on!”

“I say, me too! We helped that much, we deserve to know!”

Oof, Wataru and Emmymephy already sniffed us out. Alright... How to explain to the MVPs what happened? Without spilling every secret.

* * *

May 31st. We reached the day of the party. Haku had already sent the dresses, and we decided to participate, too, because why not. We could relax safely now that the Leona menace was gone. Time to eat a truckload of junk.

“Lady Rokuko, your dress is all on, girl. You’re up, Soto.”

“Okaaay! Thanks, Ichikaaa!”

Just like the first loop, Rokuko and Soto had Ichika put on their dresses.

“So, Keima? How does it look?” Rokuko asked. It was a dark-blue dress with few frills that left her shoulders exposed. In other words, the exact same slender dress from the first loop.

“It brings out your intellectual side. As expected of clothes Haku chose,” I said, praising her. Rokuko blushed, then blinked and shook her head.

“Wait, this is your second time seeing it. I should have worn another dress.”

“Er, well, it’s the exact same design as the first loop, but I wanted to see it again. It looks good on you.”

“Formal wear looks good on you, too, Keima. You look sharper than usual, and, how do I put this... pretty fast!”

Rokuko’s bizarre praise was exactly the same as the first loop, just like her dress.

In any case, with that done, we went to the party with the dressed-up Princess Emmymephy and Wataru the Hero.

“Whew, to think our job would end up getting so complicated. Good thing we managed to help out in the end there, huh, Princess Mephy?”

“I say, indeed. Good work to all of you, Rokuko and friends. In the end I still don’t really understand all this looping business, but it’s safe to say the problem in Daide is resolved, no?”

We had told Wataru and Emmymephy the gist of the problem that had been happening in Daide and how we’d solved it.

“Yep. You should be getting word from Haku in a few days.”

“I say, now I can finally reject the second prince’s proposal! Wheeew!” Emmymephy exclaimed, sinking down into her seat in the carriage. “Just as a warning, in the last loop the second prince brought a Wyvern egg and ended up added to the bottom of your list of suitors. Though in this loop, our actions might’ve stopped him from getting the Wyvern egg at all.”

“I suppose I shall look forward to seeing what happens.”

Either way, we rode our carriage to the castle. This time, we arrived there smoothly, without encountering any accidents on the way.

Past the entrance, we arrived at the party with its sparkling chandelier. There was the catering and the dance hall. Emmymephy took the lead, taking us up the ornate stairway to the second-floor VIP hall. She needed to greet the young king, who was sitting on an ornate sofa covered in red cloth.

“Oooh, Princess Mephy. You have done well to come tonight,” the king said.

“I thank you ever so much for inviting me on this fine night, Your Highness,” Emmymephy replied with a honed courtesy. Her manners as an imperial princess were perfect. The king, meanwhile, lifted his palm in a half salute directed her way.

“So, how was Jedha? I am told you took dungeon drills with him yesterday.”

“He was like the child of a relative to me.”

“I see. Well, please do enjoy yourself today. There will be space for you to rest here, and you may come whenever you like.”

“I say, I am most gracious.”

This time, she didn’t mention Tindalos, since there was no need to. Which reminded me, we still had Toi stuck in the {Storage} dungeon. Huh. We

probably needed to do something about that.

“Incidentally, why do the servants seem to be in a bit of a panic? Did something happen?”

“Someone invaded our science laboratory last night. The commander of the mage corps you wished to meet has since gone missing, and we do not know where he went.”

“I say, that is quite a problem. But I no longer care about Lord Tindalos, so worry not for my sake.”

Oh, that invader is me. Soz.

From there, we began enjoying the party.

We danced to the music, ate the catering, and... two small boys came up to me.

“Keima!” “It’s been a while!”

“Hm? Oh. You are... Meter, and Lacie.”

“Correct!”

The Dagon twins used to wear identical clothing, but today they were wearing different hairstyles and outfits to distinguish themselves.

“This is the first time you’ve seen us like this,” “but you still managed to distinguish us!”

I didn’t mention that was because I had them tagged.

“You were right about everything, Keima! We were children! We were selfish!”

“Now there’s no one who can’t distinguish between us! Thank you!”

“E-Er, nice. No problem,” I said. I didn’t really know why, but they were thanking me.

“It’s fun to express ourselves! Well, see you later!”

“We’re going to show ourselves to more people, so they can distinguish between us, too! Farewell!”

And with that, the twins walked off. Huh. Well, anyway.

Next we found Koreha and Summer. Summer was wearing her bunny girl outfit once again. It kind of begged the question of why Koreha was walking with her. And Summer was diligently attending the night party, too. They were both surprisingly conscientious, huh?

“Greetings, Princess Mephy, Lady Rokuko, Lady Soto.”

“G-Greetings, Lady Koreha... Lady Summer. I-I say, wearing the bunny girl outfit again, are we?”

“Yes, Princess Mephy. I decided to attend as a bunny girl this time!”

I seemed to recall the bunny girl outfit being officially approved formal wear. Surprised that held true for a night party hosted by royalty, but okay.

“I think I’ll go as a bear next time. What do you think, Keima?” Summer asked, turning her gaze to me. Oh yeah... We hadn’t told her yet.

“Er, Lady Summer. Mind if we talk over there for a second?”

“Ohmygosh, you’re finally going after my pants? I’m in! Later, Lady Koreha!”

“Wait, Lady Summer! This party is meant to celebrate the return of the student council! You are their lover, so, why would you... Aaah, good grief...” Lady Koreha facepalmed. From her perspective, the protagonist she had been on reasonably good terms with had suddenly exploded with insanity and started wearing a bunny suit everywhere. Given she had Japanese values forced onto her mind, it was probably pretty headache inducing.

In any case, I invited Summer to the balcony and headed that way with my arm locked with Rokuko’s.

“Whew, doing all the things I’ve been holding back on has felt amazing! Eheheh, since we’re going to loop anyway, I really think I want to spend the next go-around in a bear suit,” Summer said, having the time of her life.

“...Alright, I’m just gonna say it. There’s not gonna be any more loops.”

“Bwuh?”

“I’ll say it again. The looping is over. Time won’t go back anymore.”

Summer blinked rapidly.

“B-B-But, um, but, she... Um? Really?”

“Yeah, really.”

“No waaay...! You have to be kidding, right?”

“Sorry, but it’s the truth.”

Summer paled, looking sick. That was when Rokuko interjected.

“Summer, it’s all thanks to you. I mean, don’t you think this is the kind of trick that evil god would pull? Breaking the loop after you embarrassed yourself by dressing as a bunny girl the whole time?”

“Oh, oh...! CURSE YOU, CHAOOOOOOS!” Summer ripped the bunny ears off her head and slammed them on the ground. “AAAAH! CHAAAAAAAAAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOS!”

She stamped on the bunny ears hard, over and over. I leaned toward Rokuko.

“...Why’d you lie?” I asked, in a whisper.

“I didn’t lie, though? This is the same trick you always pull, Keima.”

We actually had won in part thanks to Summer sharing her information with us, and she *had* merely suggested this was a trick Leona would pull, not that she had actually done it. Yeah, that was a classic trick for me.

“There’s no need to tell her anything that would get her mad at you, no?”

“Ah, yeah, good point. I’m the one who kinda inspired her to make a fool of herself.”

Thus, Summer directed her anger toward Leona. That felt morally fine, too, since Leona was the one most at fault for forcing the loop in the first place.

“Ahem... Rokuko. Do you have any spare dresses? Er, like, one I could put on now...?”

“Even if I did, it wouldn’t be your size.”

“It’s fine! I’m a Succubus, I can alter sizes a bit!”

“Well, I don’t have one anyway.”

Summer gritted her teeth and, reluctantly, picked the bunny ears back up.

Wait, the bunny outfit becomes rude without the ears? Seriously? What kind of rule is that?

“THE FIRST PRINCE, PRINCE HARKES DAIDE, HAS RETUUURNED!”

What incredible timing. The first prince had arrived at the party.

“Oh shit,” Summer said, grimacing as if she had bitten down on a bug.

Yeah, that’s about how I’d react if I were wearing that, too.

“Summer! Summer, where are you?! Oooh! There you are, Summer... Summer?!”

The first prince launched a mad dash this way with his two lackeys, then froze in place.

“...Wh-What a cute outfit! Aaah, you are my one true love!”

“Prince H-Harkes! Umm, er, w-welcome home!”

Despite being picked up and swung through the air like a child, Summer put on a smile so cute one could practically hear a sparkling sound effect in the air. She was a pro. A pro heroine. Was the first prince really fine with her wearing that?

“H-Hey, Crusch. What’s with that lewd outfit? I’m getting all sweaty here.”

“You aren’t familiar, Kenho? It’s a bunny suit, and completely respectable formal wear. Lady Summer is quite the scholar, as expected.”

“Step off! She’s mine!”

“E-Erm, welcome home as well, Lord Kenho, Lord Crusch.”

The two lackeys smiled happily after Summer greeted them. They really *were* fine with that?

“Hrm? Who is this man?” the prince asked, glaring sharply at me.

“Oh, um... He’s the husband of my friend Lady Rokuko.”

The first prince glared at me, but this time Summer backed me up. His expression flipped in an instant.

“I am Rokuko Tsia, an exchange student. Lady Summer and I are good friends.”

“Ah, I see. You are Summer’s school friend, and he is your husband! Hrm... You weren’t discussing taking Summer as a second wife, were you?”

“I would never dream of it. I have eyes for only one woman. Right, Rokuko?”

“Indeed. Goodness, my husband did just the most incredible thing for me the other day.”

“Hrm, I see. I appreciate loyal men like that. After all, I’m just as loyal to Summer,” the prince said. Crap. He began yet another flirty tirade that I really couldn’t care less about.

“Incidentally, prince, should you not go greet your father?” Rokuko interjected once the ranting calmed down a bit.

“Oh yes, that’s right! If you’ll excuse me, Summer, I’ll be right back.”

“Right...” Summer watched the prince and his retinue go with a bit of a tired expression.

“Seems like you’re gonna have it rough in a bit. What’s your plan?”

“I’m not really sure. Time’s not going to loop, right? The second prince will become the crown prince for sure, so... Ah, I really didn’t think this far ahead.”

“Explain yourself to him, alright? Stop that idiot prince even if you have to use {Charm}.”

“Right...” Summer let out a heavy sigh.

“So, Keima,” Rokuko said. “I just called you my husband, but... Is this my second time doing that?”

“Oh, yeah. It actually is.”

“That explains why you’re so calm. Well, keep it up, papa; we have a child now.”

...Yeah, I’m gonna need to improve my anti-Haku armor when we get back.

“I say, welcome back.”

“Heya!”

We returned to the party after splitting from Summer, and found everyone else enjoying the food. Koreha was gone since, just like the last loop, she was off to talk to her older brother Crusch.

“Here, big sisses, open wiiide.”

“Welp, an order’s an order! Maids gotta obey! Aaaahn.”

“Nom nom.”

“This is the roast beef from earlier, Keima. It’s pretty good,” Wataru said.

“Sure, send some my way. I missed out on eating some last time, actually.”

I took some roast beef from Wataru and tried it out.

Whoa, it’s soft, and the sauce has a great meaty flavor. I wanna put it between two pieces of bread.

“Keima, give me some, too,” Rokuko said.

“Yeah, sure... Oh, wait, it’s about time,” I replied, pausing. There was a stir at the entrance to the party.

“THE SECOND PRINCE, PRINCE JEDHA DAIDE, HAS ARRIIIIIIVED!”

It seemed the second prince had brought his egg.

“Oh, looks like he’s coming this way,” Wataru observed.

“I say, it feels as if he is looking at me,” Mephy said. Though that wasn’t just a feeling; he was blatantly staring at her. The same was true last time, and it was definitely the same look the first prince gave Summer.

As the second prince approached, the cart being pulled by a maid behind him became more visible. A large, white egg about the size of a child was atop it.

Hmm... Seems whiter than last time.

“Princess Emmymephy. Good evening.”

“My my, if it isn’t Prince Jedha. Good evening. What might that large egg be, may I ask?”

“Certainly. It is...” the second prince paused to kneel, take Emmymephy’s

hand, and look up at her. “The egg of a Dragon. I have defeated a Dragon, and this egg is proof. Aaah... I am told that defeating a Dragon was a requirement for proposing to you. Princess Emmymephy, please, accept my feelings.”

A hushed silence fell over the party as he announced it was a Dragon egg and proposed. All eyes gathered on them, as people inhaled and awaited Emmymephy’s response. Thanks in part to my advance warning, Emmymephy wasn’t particularly surprised.

“A dragon egg... I say, do you speak true?”

“Yes. I challenged a Dragon, and won this egg as proof. Though, of course, I did have companions with me. We defeated the dragon, and upon exploring its nest further, discovered this egg.”

Emmymephy glanced our way. “I say, at times like this, I have experts on Dragons determine whether the proof is real or not!”

“That is... Wataru the Hero. I have no reason to refuse a Hero who infamously defeated a Dragon himself.”

“And so, give it a look, Keima!” Emmymephy exclaimed.

“Wait, me?”

Despite being a bit thrown off by her pointing at me instead of Rokuko, I gave the egg a look.

...Ah, yeah. Pretty sure this is just an enlarged chicken egg. I think I remember Toi mentioning that being her plan, too. At the very least, it’s tinier than the Wyvern egg from last time. It wasn’t even a half-Dragon egg.

“Wait a moment, Princess Emmymephy. You will not be having Wataru look at it?”

“He can look, too. I say, have at it.”

“Wait, me too? I dunno, I’m not too confident here... What do you think, Keima?”

“Let me see here... Ah.”

I investigated the egg, and tragically discovered the stamp on the bottom. It

was a very familiar stamp. Man, Toi really didn't put much effort in it.

"Pretty sure this is a chicken egg enlarged with magic," I said, honestly.

"Wh... How dare you say that?! My allies and I risked our lives to acquire this egg!" the second prince barked back, protesting with all he had.

"Which farm did you get this from?"

"F-Farm?! It's one insult after another with... you...?"

I flipped the egg around and showed him the stamp on the bottom. It was an expiration date, set for May 31st. And beneath it was some kind of insignia.

"Th-That's... the seal of the Nyarlathotep Hatchery?! B-But why is it there?!"

"Th-There's no mistaking it. I don't know why it's so large, but that's unmistakably an egg from my hatchery, which produces all the eggs consumed in this country!" Koreha said.

Aaah. I was wondering why the expiration date was so much like the ones in Japan. Guess this is Leona's influence, too.

"I'm afraid you've been tricked, honorable prince. This is almost certainly not a dragon egg. And since the expiration date is today, you might want to eat it," I said, stepping back. The second prince flapped his mouth open and closed.

"I say, I will have Wataru look at it, too, just to be sure. How is it?"

"There's a thin layer of mana on the outside hiding it, but I don't feel any power from the inside. As Keima said, this is probably a chicken egg enlarged with magic," Wataru said, which sent a stir through the crowd.

"Mm. I say, I have no interest in marrying a prince who must risk his life to accomplish basic daily chores."

"B-But this can't be... Ngh, Tindalos! You deceived me...!"

In any case, Emmymephy's problem was resolved without issue. The second prince stomped the ground angrily. The party was abuzz as everyone tried to figure out exactly what was wrong.

"Everyone! Be silent!" came a booming voice. The king stood up and looked down upon the crowd from the second floor. His call brought silence to the hall.

“What is the meaning of this, Jedha?”

“F-Father. I...”

“Far from successfully slaying a dragon, you were tricked and given a chicken egg? That is so shameful that Harkes would yet be a better choice,” King Daide said with a sigh of disappointment.

“Father! Does that mean I’m the crown prince now?!” came the first prince’s voice, from the dance hall. Beside him was Summer in her bunny suit.

Beside him was Summer in her bunny suit...!

“...I shall postpone my decree of the first prince!”

“Wha?! What’s the meaning of this, Father?!”

“F-Father!”

The king’s declaration sent the princes into a panic. And in the midst of that, Emmymephy muttered to herself.

“Well, I say, King Daide is still young and only just came to the throne. I don’t see the need in hurrying to select a successor.”

Those words were heard by all, due to the silence the king commanded.

Also, Summer was striking a celebratory pose and shouting, “Heck yes, I get to put it off!”

Anyway, from there, the party was brought to a quiet—quiet...?—close without Leona appearing.

Emmymephy could finally go home, since Daide had embarrassed itself so many times nobody could blame her for refusing to stay any longer.

Whew, Daide’s gonna have a pretty rough time recovering from all this, but thanks to Leona, they have ridiculously advanced technology, culture, and exports that they could pretty easily use to gain a lot of wealth. Not that I care!

“I say, I feel that things are about to get quite complicated here. Should we really be leaving?” Emmymephy asked.

“I mean, why bother caring? They’ve been managing up until now. We’re imperial citizens in the first place, so we should just let Daide handle Daide

things.”

...That said, I’m pretty sure Toi was managing things a lot herself, and now she’s frozen inside Soto’s {Storage} dungeon. Oh well. They’ll learn to manage.

* * *

Anyway, I went to the room in Soto’s dungeon where Toi was restrained. It was strangely bright for a time-stopped dungeon without any light sources. Toi was tied to a chair in the middle of a small room, with a blindfold on. This was all as per my orders.

“Heya, Toi. How are you feeling?”

“I have never felt worse, Keima. May I ask you to execute me?” Toi asked smoothly without a moment of hesitation. She was blindfolded, but probably recognized me from my voice. “After all, as my name implies, the Toi series consists of one hundred and one copies. My continued existence does not make a difference.”

“That’s a lie, isn’t it?”

“Who can say? I did not tell a lie, but perhaps it is not true, either. It is just a little joke. Ahaha.”

One hundred and one dogs? Is this an animated movie?

“Might I ask you to explain the meaning of this joke to me? I do not understand how Toi equates to 101. I asked Leona, but she refused to tell me. I would at least like to know the meaning of my words before I die.”

“So, Leona told you to tell that joke?”

“Correct.”

It seemed Toi didn’t understand Japanese. The Japanese pun in her name was simply beyond her grasp.

“It shouldn’t be too hard to figure out if you think for a second. To can mean 10, and I can mean 1. Line them up and you get 10 1, or 101.”

“My my! Now that is something else! I see, I see. I understand, and have learned. You have my gratitude. Aha, ahahaha!”

Toi laughed, endlessly amused at something or another. It seemed like she was getting pretty self-destructive.

Still, I couldn't read her expression. She was supposedly more expressive than Niku, but her expression was even harder to read than Niku's. Not due to the blindfold, either. It was because her ears and tail were absolutely rigid, never moving an inch.

"Alright. Now, for how we're going to deal with you."

"Oh yes, do as you like. You may even cut off two, three of my arms and play with them as you like. Would you like me to piss myself while trembling and screaming in fear? I am told men like that sort of behavior."

"You only have two arms... And why're you so calm about this?"

"I have simply accepted my fate. After all, I am a mere toy. It is only natural that a useless toy be broken and disposed of. I remain a toy until that occurs."

"I guess it is beastkin nature to be obsessed over one's name. Honestly, I'm impressed you're this loyal to Leona."

"Of course I am. The beastkin were created by Lady Leona, you know."

Wait, what? That's the first time I'm hearing about this. Is it true? But I mean... I guess this is Leona we're talking about. She must have seen the lack of beastkin in this world, then been like, "If there aren't any beastkin here, I'll just have to make them myself!" and got to work. After all, this is Leona we're talking about. This is Leona we're talking about. This is... Leona...

"There's something I want you to see. I'll be taking the blindfold off, don't struggle."

"Certainly, but what is it you wish for me to see?"

I removed Toi's blindfold, then showed her the scroll Leona had given me.

"It's a message from Leona. It says to obey me."

"Ah! From Lady Leona!" Toi rattled her chair, straining her head toward the scroll.

"Closer, bring it closer, Keima. Aaah, Lady Leona, Lady Leona, Lady Leonaaa!"

Despite being a bit disturbed, I stepped closer, and Toi pressed her nose against the scroll, inhaling deeply.

“Lady Leona... Aaah, sniff sniff, nnnhh, nhhh, fwaah! There’s no mistaking it, this is Lady Leona’s scent. Aaah, yes, yes, understood, Lady Leona! No, I mean I won’t, yes, no, aaah, this order, I, I, I-I-I-I, aaaaah! Fwaaaaah!”

Toi trembled as she read the message on the scroll. Her tail was whipping back and forth through the air, unlike anything I had seen from her before. A pool of liquid was forming beneath her on the chair and dripping to the floor; she had apparently pissed herself. I went ahead and used {Purification} on it. This was Soto’s dungeon, after all.

I took another look at the scroll. Strange, it only said to listen to my orders. Why was she freaking out? It was honestly disturbing, in a real sense.

“H-Hey, what the hell happened? Is there something on the scroll?”

“Yes, yes, do allow me to answer. It has Lady Leona’s orders. It says to obey you, Lord Keima, and to never obey her again.”

I squinted, ignoring the “Lord” there, but didn’t see that anywhere... Oh, but this was something Leona had written. If it were in Japanese, wouldn’t I be able to read it while Toi couldn’t? And in turn, it could have some instructions Toi would understand but I didn’t?

“Where and how does it say that?”

“It’s the smell, Lord Keima. The smell says everything. By lining up the smells in these illustrations, I can deduce the order directed to me.”

It was a hidden message one could only decode with a dog beastkin’s sense of smell and an understanding of the methodology. All this, hidden within the very words she wrote. Friggin’ Leona. She pulled this right in front of me, in the span of a few seconds.

“Aaah, the inherent contradiction of obeying an order to not obey. What a heart-wrenching order; it is both a punishment for me, and a new life mission. Aaah, there is nothing sweeter than being toyed with by the whims of my master. This is what makes life as a toy worth living! I shall obey Lady Leona’s last orders, and henceforth obey you, Lord Keima. Say anything you like.”

To be honest, I couldn't trust Toi, and thus didn't really want her to serve me.

"Lord Keima, shall I lick your feet? Or would you like me to show my stomach, for you to rub or step upon? Aha, or how about attaching a leash to my collar and dragging me around, to the point of choking me? Should I continue wearing clothes? Or would you prefer me to strip?"

Toi had gone into loyal-dog mode. There was a crazy look in her eyes, too... Who knew what she would have done if she weren't tied to the chair.

"You don't need to do any of that. Uhh, I'll pass you over to Haku, so just tell her everything you know and help her with anything she needs."

"Understood, Lord Keima. Ah, and the scroll, ah... Sniff, sniiiiiff...!"

I held out the scroll, and Toi jammed her nose against it, inhaling sharply and overwhelmed with joy.

Haku has lie-detecting magic, so she'll probably be able to manage somehow. Probably, definitely. Maybe.

Toi apparently gave a Hero's worth of DP a day, so for now we decided to leave her locked up. Niku volunteered to look after her, a bit smugly, so I let her. Niku was the winner of their duel, after all, even if it was only through the Dungeon's power. Have fun.

* * *

And so, after returning to the empire, we ended up attending a tea party with Haku. It had become regular for us to give our reports at a tea party whenever something happened. I sat across from Haku, while Rokuko and Soto sat between us. Chloe, Niku, and Ichika were standing to the side as maids.

To start the tea party, I presented Toi, who was tied to a chair, blindfolded, and gagged.

"Pl—"

"You may take care of Chaos's dog yourself, Keima."

Haku shut me down before I could even say, "Please accept this gift."

"Er, if I'm gonna be honest, I don't really think I can handle her."

“Fundamentally, she will listen only to Leona’s orders. Leona instructed her to obey you specifically, Keima. Thus, even if I accept her, she will not obey me.”

“Even if I order her to obey you and continue on the chain?”

“Indeed. She will look for even the slightest loophole to exploit and return to your side, so that she may prioritize Leona’s direct orders,” Haku said flatly. Toi bobbed her head in agreement.

Hey! Want me to block your ears, too, huh?

“Furthermore, there is nothing I wish to ask Chaos’s dog. Luckily, you sent Leona to me already. Oh, and she is currently lounging in a jail beneath the castle, calling it a rest break. She has even prepared her own bed and the like.”

H-Huh. I honestly kind of forgot I sent Leona to Haku already. Guess there’s no point interrogating a lackey when you’ve got the boss. Especially when the boss is still hanging around.

“I heard everything from Leona herself... Ah, excellent job landing a merciless punch on her face,” Haku said, looking a bit more morose than her praise implied.

“That’s right, Haku, Keima was amazing! He worked so hard for my sake!” Rokuko exclaimed.

“Indeed, I suppose I will... have to accept him as little Soto’s father,” Haku said, at Rokuko’s firm prompting.

Oh yeah, the whole point of this trip to Daide was to get Haku to accept me as Soto’s father! Good job, me! Now I can sleep without being afraid of Dolce assassinating me!

Suddenly, Rokuko tilted her head in confusion. “Wait, Haku. What about our reward for solving the problem in Daide that even Wataru couldn’t solve, on top of getting Leona in your prison? I think we deserve a payment, too.”

Excuse me?! Rokuko, don’t push our lu—

“Of course. My original payment for Wataru was going to be ten ivory coins, that is, a thousand gold coins, so with that in mind, I will award you ten million DP. Oh, yes. That includes payment for discovering a new way of using Wataru’s

powers. Do you find this fair, Keima? I imagine you do.”

A hundred million yen as payment...?! At this point, I can just retire and spend every day sleeping, right?

It was so much I genuinely began to consider retirement. W-Was it even okay for me to get that much?

“Er, are you sure about this? You don’t have to pay us.”

“How do you intend to support Soto if you work for free? Humility is a common virtue for Heroes, but this is a step above that.”

“That’s right, Keima. You’re a dad now, you have to be more mature here!”

Ngh, good point. I’m a dad, so now it’s my responsibility to support Rokuko and Soto...!

“Rokuko, ten million DP is naturally quite a significant load, so I will spend two days thoroughly passing it over to you. Please do stay the night. Okay?”

“Okaaaay, sister.”

Incidentally, I doubted that the new method of using Wataru’s powers would be especially effective, since one had to be as dangerous as Leona for his luck to take effect like that, but okay.

“So, Keima, there is somewhere I would like you to go,” Haku said, changing the topic.

“Wait, you want me to go on another investigation?”

“No. This is a search-and-destroy mission.”

Pretty serious stuff... You should ask Wataru to handle that kind of thing, not me.

“The Holy Kingdom. They are manufacturing artificial dungeons there somewhere. I entrust the rest to you, Keima.”

Er, I made bank off this, so I’d really like to go home and sleep, but... Oh, never mind, forget I said anything! I have a cute wife and daughter to support now, huh?!

Extra Episode — The Ultra Lucky Hero Wataru's Labor Gets Exploited

“I’ll tell you everything once this is over. Which means, yeah, I can’t tell you anything until it’s all over. If you want to know what’s up, ask your {Ultra Good Fortune} to do a good job here.”

And so, Wataru ended up stuck rolling dice like crazy with Emmymephy writing down the results. When he finally, finally finished and had a night’s rest, his relief was shattered first thing in the morning.

“Heeey, Wataru. Pick which strategies we should use. The strategies are a secret, though!”

“Alright then, this one, this one, this one... this one. Oh, and this one, too.”

Keima held out some tubes, looking as exhausted as someone who had stayed up the entire night, and Wataru randomly picked some of them.

“Hm? I don’t remember making this tube... Uh, what the heck is this? Whaaat...?”

Keima, after checking the contents of the tube he didn’t recognize, slapped his forehead and looked at the ceiling.

“...Well, Wataru, there’s another job only you can do. You’ll help, right?”

Wataru didn’t mind helping, but naturally even his cheeks twitched at that.

And so, Wataru ended up working with Soto to trick people into thinking she was a god. He was there to guard her and provide legitimacy to her claims. (And hide her from Chaos, but he didn’t know that.)

“Behold, Sototemporarily the Goddess of Time! The Goddess Sototemporarily controls all time, be aware!”

Wataru was introducing Keima’s daughter Soto to the masses as she stood atop a simply made stage. It felt something like a political rally to Wataru.



“Wataru, I think it’s about time to move on. The Goddess of Time must adhere to her schedule!” Soto declared.

“Understood, your holiness Sototemporarily. Er... And that concludes today’s Sototemporarily show! Oyasuminasai!”

All they were doing was having them shown into time-slowed chambers Soto made one by one, from which they looked outside. From the outside, those in the chamber looked like they were moving slow, while from the inside those on the outside looked like they were moving fast. It was a miracle of time. And it was so much like fraud Wataru accidentally called it a show.

In any case, the scheduling of her demonstration was honed down to the hour, such that they never took place where Wataru was told not to go after rolling thousands of dice.

There were plenty of empty spaces on the danger heat map, and that’s where the demonstrations were held. The results of {Ultra Good Fortune} meant that coincidentally... or rather, by necessity, they were taken to places where people could easily gather. Wataru honestly thought it was turning out to be some excessive plot armor, even. But since the situation was apparently so bad that this was necessary to have a chance of winning, Wataru decided not to think too hard about it.

“Still, Soto, is that trick of yours really just a trick?”

“Uh-huh. Though there’s nothing deceptive about it.”

Wataru was starting to think she really was performing miracles. That would make him feel less guilty, but for some reason Keima had told him they were committing fraud.

Still, Wataru was just glad to finally be freed from rolling dice. And the schedule was for him to spend some time in the inn after this. No doubt he would finally get time to rest.

“Alriiight, not to copy Keima here, but it’s time for me to nap like crazy,” Wataru said, opening the door to his inn room.

“Hey Wataru, I’ve been waiting for you to get back. Mind rolling some more

dice for me?” Keima asked, holding out more graph paper.

“Figures... Do I really have {Ultra Good Fortune}? I’m starting to doubt it,” Wataru said, letting out a dry laugh.

Incidentally, as soon as he got back to the empire, a new system was set in place where he would always roll dice to figure out where he should go when patrolling the empire, but that is a story for another day.

Afterword

Volume 15. What a milestone! I've come this far thanks to all of you. I feel like it's taken a long time to get this far. Or, well, it's been five entire years, so yeah, pretty long. Cars don't fly yet, but first-graders are now sixth-graders! By the seventeenth volume, they might be graduating middle school? This makes me feel kinda old... Wait, my old classmates already have kids?! Why am I single when my cousin XXX has already married?! Aarrgh! Okay, I admit it, my romance skill is underleveled! Oh, by the way, it suddenly became spring in this volume, but a full year has actually passed in the work since Volume 11. The dungeon assembly went off without a hitch, so I skipped it. I wrote some of it in a bonus short story, which some people may have on hand now.

Anyway, here is this volume's afterword. I can write four pages for this one. I'm a fan of puzzles, as I've mentioned, and in this volume I'm putting in a nonogram puzzle. Those who have never played *Picross* before should be able to look up the trick to solving them pretty easily. It's a 30x30 puzzle, and fairly difficult. I might have put a little too much effort into it.

In any case, thanks to all your help, I've made it all the way to Volume 15. Spoilers abound from this point on, so those who haven't read the volume yet should be aware. Okay? Reading further will be taken as consent. Alright, thank you for your consent. Let's get started.

Volume 15. Looking back, Keima finally had a child. To think the Dungeon Core he got way back when would end up like this... Quite a few people predicted this when I introduced it back at the time. Incidentally, the divine way of making children is something I wrote about in my Narou blog before. It was a short story I wrote to celebrate Takenoko-sensei coming of age (the author of *Genocide Online*, a LDM fan who sent me fan letters, then became an author himself). It only makes sense to celebrate a coming of age by talking about how to make children.

So, we went right ahead and put the newly born Soto on the cover art! Oh... It

was Kinue's turn, though? Well, Kinue is all about working hard in the shadows. She might end up on Volume 17's cover art, though I just have it in my head that the final volume will have all the main characters like Rokuko and Keima on the cover, but if she's not on the next one give up on a Kinue cover. Yep.

As for how this volume differs from the web novel, pretty much everything about how they beat Daide is different. The root cause of this difference goes back to where Leona wandered after Volume 6. After leaving Goren, she lazily traveled to the Demon Realm, messed with Keima's group in Volume 11 as part of her experiment, then went to Daide for further experimentation. Something like that. That said, in the web novel they used the Divine Alarm to similarly beat Daide in no time like it was a speedrun. How exactly will these differences echo into eternity...? Or perhaps they won't at all, actually...? Who can say...

Oh, looks like I barely have any space left. Guess that's it from me this time. May we meet again in the next volume. Please enjoy the puzzle.

Supana Onikage

Afterword Bonus Minigame: Monogram

[illegible]

Rules: Fill in the squares to match both the horizontal and vertical numbers. For rows/columns with multiple numbers, fill the squares in the order of those numbers, and leave at least one empty space between the chunks.



Bonus Short Stories

Chaos Drugs — For You, for Those Who Want to Change Their Lives

The Kingdom of Daide. One of the places that Wataru had been subconsciously avoiding was a store that sold magic potions. I followed Ichika to take a peek inside.

The interior felt entirely like a Japanese-style candy store, or maybe a general store. There were shelves, boxes filled with potion bottles lined up next to each other, and pouches with tablets. The handbaskets at the entrance for putting goods into were pretty convenient.

“Guess it makes sense this kind of store would have nothing but medicine, huh?” I mused.

“Yuppers. Oh, the [Nopetokids]’s pretty cheap here. Sweet, I was gonna run out soon,” Ichika said, plopping a pouch of tablets into her basket.

“Huh? What’re those for?”

“Yikes. It’s a contraceptive.”

“...Er, what? Are you going to... use them?”

“Uh-huh, but don’t get any dirty ideas, ’kay? This stuff’s essential for all girl adventurers. Without it, you’ll end up unable to work a few days every month.”

It was apparently used to stop *that time of the month*. It cost ten coppers, which was around one thousand yen in Japanese terms, and since it didn’t have any side effects, it was pretty highly valued all over.

“Huh, sounds convenient... But wait, that naming sense... Is this a Chaos Drug?”

“Yup?”

Chaos Drugs. Such was the name of all sorts of magical drugs that Leona had

spread throughout the world as the God of Chaos. There was the “Futanaruu” potion, for example. Drink it and strangely enough, you would end up a hermaphrodite. It was a Chaos Drug that introduced chaos to one’s sex. (If you just wanted to change your gender, there was the Tee S potion, and if you wanted to change your sex but not your outward appearance, there were potions for that too — Tree Grower and Weed Cutter, for instance.) The thing about Chaos Drugs was that their names were, like, blatant puns? They probably didn’t even work in this world’s language.

“Seriously? Leona was even making this kind of thing...? And mass-producing it, too?”

“Ahaha, I dunno about the recipe, but Leona didn’t make these pills herself. Some Chaos Drugs have public formulas.”

“Oh, huh.”

“Cause I mean, alchemy is the God of Chaos’ field to begin with.”

Drugs powerful enough to change one’s gender were one thing, but ones in day-to-day use had their recipes available for sale at the Alchemy Guild, apparently.

“...Chaos Drugs sure help society out, huh? Dang.”

“Yuppers. Thanks to Chaos Drugs, nobles don’t need to sweat the gender of their successor, and thus a society that prioritized merit above all else was born, or somethin’.”

Hmm. Gender freedom in fantasy worlds sure was something else.

“There’s this one drug called Highlander Z that boosts fertility, y’know? It’s filed under aphrodisiacs, and couples that need a successor use it all the time. Sounds like a good gift for Rokuko, huh?”

“Nah, I’m good. We just had a kid.”

Incidentally, aphrodisiacs had a stupid number of categories, and one would apparently just use whichever they felt like at the time. Leona didn’t have a legion of Succubi serving her for nothing, it seemed.

“Chaos Drugs sure are a normal part of life, huh... Wait. What’s this? It’s

pretty expensive.”

“That’s Vwoom. It makes your boobs bigger. This one’s Shoom, it makes your boobs smaller. Mommy Milkers gives you breast milk. There sure are a lot of boob-related ones here, huh? Boingboing gives you massive boobs.”

“There’s that many... Wet Sheets? Okay, I can guess what this one does.”

“There’s Furrification, too. Turns you into a beastkin.”

One’s beast-ratio rose the more of it you drank, apparently. At max, you could become a talking animal.

Oh, this wide-lipped bottle’s got some, like, blue jelly inside it. Let’s see here...

“Super Balding... Yeah, okay. Are there any hair growth ones?”

“That one’s good for getting rid of extra hair. As for Super Hairy, well, it’s out of stock, and the recipe’s private. What, you’re sweating about that too?”

Apparently the price of Chaos hair-growth drugs went through the roof. As expected, perhaps.

“Oh, look, this one’s just called Scoop. Hm? Oh, it’s a truth serum? I get it, like a detective finding a scoop. This is getting kinda funny.”

“Not really making much sense to me, not gonna lie. Master, what about this Ginger Ale and Night Aniki? What kinda jokes are they?”

“Let’s see what they do... This makes one feel as if they are supported by the gods, and this one increases your Chaos power, at the cost of talking funny. Well... All I can say is that they’re less puns and more references. Also, what’s Chaos power?”

“One of my old gal pals said it just made alchemy easier... Oh, lookie, Mage-i Restoration. This boosts mana growth, so it’d be the perfect gift for Neruneh.”

“And these Fist-roids... They boost muscle mass. Figures, though the name is kind of violent.”

I’m surprised Leona made this many of them, seriously. Though she was probably just trying to smoke out whoever would understand the jokes.

“...Still, I’m glad we didn’t come with Wataru. I wouldn’t have been able to

play dumb the whole time.”

“Ahaha, lucky, lucky. Want some Ginger Ale?”

Incidentally, the Ginger Ale was a watery potion that almost tasted like ginger ale but not quite, which made it kind of yucky.

Rokuko's Pets

Set the stage at Phenny's playground, which was in the [Cave of Greed], right before the entrance to the [Flame Caverns].

“Chirp.”

Phenny, the white Phoenix, chirped to itself, flapping its wings to stay immobile in the air.

“...”

Jewely, the Jewel Turtle, lifted its head slowly.

“Nom nom...”

Puck, the Panda Mimic, chewed on its bamboo.

“...Why am I even here?”

And finally, Igni the Flame Dragon. The four of them had finally been united.

Incidentally, the above exchange could be translated as follows:

Phenny: “Today, too, has been a day of peace.”

Jewely: “Indeed. I pray that this peace continues.”

Pucky: “Yo, I literally do not care as long as the food's good. Ain't that right, Karen!”

Igni: “...Why am I even here?”

And so it was.

...For convenience's sake, the easy-to-understand translation will henceforth be provided first.

“Oh, we merely wished to strengthen our bonds, dear Karen.” Phenny flapped

down and landed on Igni's head.

"Indeed. We are all Lady Rokuko's pets, Karen." Jewelry steadily climbed into Igni's lap as she was sitting cross-legged.

"It's a drag being around these two grandpas all the time. It's nice to have another kid around, y'know, Karen?"

Puck patted Igni's back casually.

What unified the four of them? They were all creatures Rokuko had rolled in the gacha. She had then declared she would keep them as pets and named them. Though Igni had been immediately returned to the [Flame Caverns].

"...My name's Igni, though."

"Lady Rokuko named you Karen, so you are Karen," the three others all replied instantly. Igni raised her hands in defeat, not invested in pushing the point.

"We are Lady Rokuko's legion of pets! She has our everlasting loyalty!"

"Wait, are you including me in that?"

It seemed they were indeed including Igni in that.

"But of course. What say we change our name to the Four Heavenly Kings?"

"Not bad, not bad! I love that kinda shit! Oh, how about the Four Divine Beasts instead?"

"G-Gr... Th-That's pretty cool, actually!" Igni said, unable to resist. Jewelry chuckled.

"Are you familiar with them, Jewelry?"

"But of course. It is a concept known within Lord Keima's world, no? They are four beasts, at times called gods, that protect the four corners of the world. I seem to recall them being the Blue Dragon, the Red Sparrow, the White Tiger, and the Black Tortoise... Hm, and by some twist of fate, we are a Dragon, a Phoenix, a white and black Beast, and a Turtle. This must be Lady Rokuko's karma at work... In short, I am none other than Jewelry the Black Tortoise."

Everything depended on how you chose to look at it. Incidentally, the word

“panda” could also be written as “large bear cat” in Japanese, and one could say that tigers and large cats were technically family. Though only distantly, like cats and dogs being family.

“So I would be Phenny the Red Sparrow.”

“I’m Puck the White Tiger!”

“Um, I’m Ig... Karen the Blue Dragon? But I’m not blue...”

“Hm. I suppose I should be red as well, then? One moment, I will make adjustments,” Phenny said, then turned from white to blue, and then from blue to red.

“Wow, Phenny! How’d you do that?” Igni asked.

“I lowered my temperature. I cannot change my maximum temperature, but I need only to relax my power to lower it.”

“Not bad, Phenny-bro! Hm? So wait, Karen could get blue, too, by heatin’ up a bit, no?”

“Oh, huh, maybe I could!”

“There is logic to Puck’s words. If even her mother, the Red Dragon, can spit white fire, then surely a Flame Dragon such as yourself could cloak yourself in blue flames.”

“When you put it like that...”

No doubt that would be like a huge power up if she could do it. Igni decided to practice.

Incidentally, there were also the Qilin and Yellow Dragon that were considered the center of the Four Divine Beasts. Opinions were split on whether they should be Rokuko and Keima, if the Elf Ghost and Fairy girls could fit the part, or if it should be put off until new pets were summoned. In the end, the decision was put off.

“...Also, Puck called you grandpas, but just how old are you two, exactly?”

“I am yet young in this incarnation, but I am collectively over a thousand years old by now, I suppose,” the Phoenix replied.

“As for myself... three thousand, I imagine? It is not yet five thousand, that I believe,” replied the Turtle with a jeweled shell.

“I’m a baby. I’m just a young twenty years old,” the Panda replied, who was a lot younger, but still twenty whole years old.

“Everyone but the panda is older than me?!”

“Indeed, young chick.”

“Indeed, young hatchling.”

Igni never thought that at two hundred years old, she would be at the bottom of an age ranking like this.

“Should I start calling you big sis, Karen? I did join this group after you,” Puck said.

“Naaah, pass. I don’t really want to start treating Phenny and Jewelry as grandpas, so...”

“Right on! I think of you as a little sister anyway, Karen!”

“That kinda annoys me, too, just saying.”

And so, Igni decided not to think about age at all.

Daide’s School Uniforms

One thing led to another, and somehow, Rokuko and Soto ended up enrolling into Daide’s royal academy as students. However, to attend school, one needed to wear a uniform. Rokuko and Soto didn’t technically need uniforms since their transfer was so abrupt, but... This was a rare opportunity to attend school. They wanted to wear uniforms.

“I say, regarding the uniforms, I can provide you with one of my spares, Rokuko. Though they would be too large for Soto.”

“Oh, you don’t mind? Thanks, Mephy.”

“Think nothing of it! I am just glad to attend school with you, Rokuko!”

“Grrr, but I wanted to eat some of y— Ngh! I wanted to wear some of your

clothes, too! In fact, I will anyway!”

“I say, did you just say you wanted to eat them?”

And so, they borrowed some of Emmymephy the imperial princess’s spare uniforms.

However, they had been tailored specifically for her. The results were obvious.

“...Sorry, Mephy. This is kinda tight. And by kinda, I mean extremely.”

“Aaah, my apologies. I say, I thought it would be fine since we are the same height, but I see I made a mistake.”

Clothes made to fit Emmymephy perfectly would not fit someone else. However, Emmymephy took out a sewing set.

“The school uniforms are made so you can adjust them to be larger as you grow older. It stinks of cheapness, I say, but it is convenient. And since I can sew, I can fix them up right now.”

“Oh, you can?”

The royal family of the Laverio Empire was taught every possible skill they could need in any situation. A bit of sewing was included in that; besides, embroidery was a hobby high-class women were expected to enjoy. Thus, Emmymephy could easily make some alterations to clothing. In truth, she had brought some maids with her specifically for this kind of work, but they had already “disappeared,” so there was no helping that.

“I’ll alter it, so just tell me where it’s tight.”

“The chest. Everywhere else is fine.”

Emmymephy fell silent. She quietly rested a hand on her own flat chest. Well, there were tiny bumps. Just tiny ones. Tiny bits of soft squishiness. Indeed, the problem was that Rokuko’s chest was unusually large. After all, she was the sister of Haku Laverio, also known as the Goddess of the Bountiful Breasts! (Emmymephy was supposed to be her descendent, too, but oh well...) “Mama! It fits perfect on me!”

“Oh, really? You already put it on? Wait... The sleeves are completely hanging

off you.”

“But the chest part fits me just fine!”

Emmymephy narrowed her eyes. The chest area fit Soto perfectly. In other words, Emmymephy’s chest was as small as a child’s, and... No. I will say no more. I will not speak as if it's the truth.

And so, despite using all the extra cloth in the outfit, there still wasn’t enough for Rokuko. To make matters worse, Emmymephy had been padding her chest a bit. Just a bit! Just to feel a little better! And when she gave her outfit to Rokuko, she had stealthily removed the padding...!

“...I say, oh well. They won’t be as high quality as my order-made outfits, but clothing stores will have uniforms of all sizes. The seamstresses there will also alter them a bit for you.”

“Ah, that makes sense. They can premake them since they all have the same design.”

“Indeed. I say, the lack of individuality is boring, but at least they are efficient!”

That said, Emmymephy’s premade outfits were all the same design, too, outside of the chest area. In fact, she only had to get them custom-made to change the chest... B-But the size of one’s chest can be considered individuality!

“I say, we should have done this from the start. We need to buy one for Soto, anyway.”

“Let’s get going.”

They went to the clothing store with Wataru as a guard and bought their clothes.

“No alterations necessary, I see. Same goes for the young lady.”

They had an employee fit them, but the uniforms fit both Rokuko and Soto perfectly. The child-sized uniform fit like a glove on Soto. Emmymephy got depressed all over again. Her chest was so unnaturally small, her uniforms needed to be tailor-made to compensate...

Soto patted Emmymephy’s back. “Mephy, I love your boobs!”

“Soto... Y-You’re willing to call this flat board of a chest ‘boobs’...?”

“Yes!”

“Soto!”

Emmymephy hugged Soto. The bones of her chest kind of hurt a bit. However, that was fun for Soto, too. The Sototemporarily way was to enjoy others’ individuality.

“Also, Papa cares more about feet. He wouldn’t care at all about boobs as long as he gets to see feet.”

“Hey! D-Don’t get any ideas, Mephy. Keima is my husband, okay?!”

Theoretically speaking, Keima would indeed care more about feet than boobs. She had a point.

“I say, I know. I won’t lay a hand on Keima.”

However, Emmymephy did think it would be nice to marry someone who wasn’t concerned about the size of someone’s chest.

Goren’s Artificial Mana Blades

Goren. It was a town that developed around the [Cave of Greed], and at the moment Daide’s first prince was visiting it. He was wearing a makeshift adventurer’s outfit, but the regality (i.e., uncanniness) radiating off him was impossible to hide. Of the party of four, only one was a proper adventurer. The adventurers who passed by nodded to themselves, deduced it was some noble being protected like a baby, and moved on while keeping to themselves.

“Oho. This town seems nice indeed.”

“Agreed, Prince. There are farm fields over there.”

“Hey, hey, any weapon shops? There’s gotta be some since there’s a dungeon nearby.”

Despite everything, they spoke so frankly at the edge of town. They apparently had no intention of hiding their identities.

“Oh! Look, Harkes. There’re some shops,” said Kenho Cthugha, the next

knight commander (self-proclaimed), while pointing excitedly at the Daide Company.

“A store in a dungeon town, hm? They may have rare goods indeed,” said Crusch Nyarlathotep, the next royal minister (self-proclaimed), with a curious nod.

“I see. That is indeed a possibility. Let’s go,” said Harkes Daide, the next king (self-proclaimed), as he took a step forward. But the moment he did, their babysitter... or rather, the adventurer they hired as a guard, Djungarian Hastur, spoke out.

“Everyone, what say we rent a room at an inn first? Surely we have all grown hungry on this trip. We can eat while there.”

There was only one inn in this town. If there wasn’t a free room, they’d need to camp outside the town, or pass through Tsia mountain’s long tunnel to stay in the neighboring town. With that in mind, well, the party agreed to go to the inn without much fuss.

* * *

“Still, to think they would use food tickets here, too. This place is fancier than I thought,” Harkes said.

“Not to mention, even a child was eating here. Judging by her clothes, she was either an apprentice nun, or perhaps the town chief’s daughter. Either way, she was well dressed,” Crusch observed.

“That nun felt a lot like Summer somehow, y’know?”

The prince’s retinue filled their stomachs at the inn’s dining hall, then headed to the store they had seen earlier. Incidentally, their bodyguard Djungarian had been reverse-catcalled by a passing girl, who then dragged him off somewhere. What a playboy. Though he had looked somewhat nauseous about it.

The Daide Company primarily did business with travelers, merchants, and adventurers. They dealt with goods brought out of the dungeon, which meant they could have high hopes for rare or unique goods.

“Neat, they even have plates,” Crusch said.

“Not bad plates, either. They can be found in the dungeon then, I presume?” Prince Harkes mused, looking at the everyday wares corner with Crusch. Dungeon goods were particularly common and well-liked souvenirs.

“These cushions are one thing, but what about these wooden sculptures?” Harkes asked.

“They seem to be some kind of artistic statement. Oh, they have iron rings, too.”

“Hrmm, I do recall that one can farm iron from Iron Golems. Using these rings to market their iron does make sense.”

Their browsing, however, was interrupted by Kenho suddenly shouting.

“Hey, hey, you two! Forget that boring stuff, they’re selling swords! Let’s look at those!”

“I am curious about that, too. Alright, let’s go, Crusch.”

“It is a store for adventurers, after all. I wonder if they handle weapon maintenance as well?”

They headed to the weapon corner, where several swords were lined up.

“Iron swords, I see. They do seem stronger than bronze blades,” Harkes observed.

“They seem both destructive and sharp.”

“Heeey, Harkes, Crusch! Check it out, they’ve got Magic Blades!”

Kenho was correct. There were Magic Blades at two gold pieces a pop nearby.

“Hrm! Magic Blades with a sharpening effect... Worth the price, it seems.”

“But we can find these in the dungeon, yeah? Let’s just go down there already,” Kenho replied.

“We will need to wait for Djungarian to return before we can do that, though.”

Kenho was satisfied just from looking over the weapons for a bit, but suddenly something caught the corner of his eye.

“Hold on a second, is this sword a Magic Blade, too...?” he muttered. It was no normal blade. It was priced at one gold, and had several magic tools attached to it. And its name was...

“Whoa, Nelly! You’ve got some sharp eyes, my dude! That sword’s what we here call an Artificial Magic Blade!” came a voice. It belonged to an orange-haired girl wearing a maid outfit with a fairly short skirt. She spoke in the thick dudebro accent of Pavella and seemed to work here as a staff member.

“An Artificial Magic Blade?”

“Yuppers! Our guy Kanatara the local dwarf smith put his all into making this baby!”

“...So it’s a fake Magic Blade, made by humans.”

“Nah, it’s an Artificial Magic Blade! The Demon Realm’s got all sorts of research on this kinda stuff, y’know. Why not grab one to take home? It’s an iron blade, too, so you won’t be wasting your money. The other blades are all made by Kantara, too, so yeah.”

Now that she mentioned it, the Artificial Magic Blade did seem to be like a normal iron blade, just with magic tools stuck on it.

“Not to mention, you can even swap the magic tools around! You’ve got magic tools that blast water, which is totes good for washing off blood, and there’s fire magic tools for cool-as-heck flamethrower strats,” the employee said while lining up various magic tools.

“Well, I suppose buying them together would be cheaper than buying them separately...?”

“Yup, yup! You won’t find crazy swords like this even among real-deal Magic Blades! Heck, it’ll be good small talk for your girlfriend, so buying one for the road can only pay off, I’m tellin’ ya.”

“We don’t have much money to waste, but, hm... Small talk, you say? Alright, I’ll buy it!”

“Thankie thankie!”

The employee shoved the sword into his hands and hastily took the payment,

as if hurrying before he changed his mind.

“That was a good sale!” Harkes declared.

“Yeah, let’s go show off to Djungarian!”

“I see that even Kenho can find diamonds in the rough sometimes,” Crusch said.

The three of them left the store with beaming expressions. However, later on, Djungarian told them they could just use {Purification} to clean off the blood and {Ignite} to set it on fire, which in turn meant they had basically just bought an extra-expensive iron sword. The prince’s retinue all wore flat expressions.

“...Wait, yer tellin’ me that thing actually sold? I thought it’d be rottin’ there ferever.”

“Oh, Kantara! Yeah man, some suckers came in, and I got them real good!”

“Yer somethin’ else, Ichika.”

Dungeon Core Assembly

It was a bright spring day, four years from the day Keima first came to the world. Once again, the yearly Dungeon Core assembly was being held. Today’s gathering spot was a garden with warm sunlight raining down upon it. There was an ivory fountain spraying water in the center where reptilian Dungeon Cores were playing. On the other side of a square hedge was a massive black Dragon chugging from alcohol barrels—Dungeon Core 5, the Dragon King. Ittetsu (Core 112) was there as a fellow member of the Dragon King faction, and he was drinking from a barrel in place of a cup as well.

“Hard to mingle with that kind of group,” Rokuko said to herself. She had thought about greeting Ittetsu, but since Keima had told her not to drink, she stuck to just looking from afar. Ittetsu himself had turned himself into something of an alcohol diffuser, since his body heat transformed the alcohol he drank into a vapor in the air. She would get drunk just by walking up to him. In fact, many people had gotten drunk already.

That said, even if she did try to mingle, she'd be shooed off as a member of the traitor faction. Oh, well.

In any case, Rokuko went to the buffet-style tables of food to at least grab something to eat.

"Wait, could it be?!"

Amid all the food was a plate of melon rolls, hidden like treasure amid the mountains. She grabbed one without any hesitation.

"Hm, these taste a bit on the expensive side."

Rokuko chewed her way through them, not questioning why melon rolls were here. The stack of melon rolls on the sizable plate didn't shrink no matter how many she ate. The same was true for the other kinds of food as well.

"Strange, we can eat forever and there's still more. I guess that's perfect, since I'm a Dungeon Core and can actually eat forever!"

This was basically melon roll heaven. It would be perfect if there were just a few more varieties of them... Oh, how about cutting open a melon roll and fitting in some nearby fruit? No, maybe it would be best to be bold and add some sour-flavored pasta to it. The possibilities were endless!"

"Oh what fun you seem to be having, Rokuko," came a familiar voice. Rokuko turned and saw Aidy standing there.

"Aidy! It's been a while. Oh, do you want some?"

"Ahaha, how clever to insert fried bird meat into melon rolls. Have you been doing well, I wonder?"

"Uh-huh, of course. I've been texting you and stuff, too."

"And yet meeting in the flesh makes all the difference. We cannot duel over texts, can we?"

"...We won't duel in person, either, to be clear. Though I'm willing to challenge you to see who can make the tastiest roll combination."

"Challenge accepted. If I win, we shall duel."

"No bets, or I'll take it back."

“...If you insist. Oh, how does inserting human entrails between hot slabs of ore sound? I call it the cave-in sandwich.”

There were many different types of Dungeon Cores, and thus many different kinds of food. How the food was prepared is a mystery, but there were even shapeless food without ‘life’ for Ghost-type cores, so naturally, Aidy’s suggestion was more than possible to recreate then and there.

“Mm, eating that in a dungeon is one thing, but I don’t know about eating it with my mouth.”

“A mere joke. Let us limit ourselves to things that can be eaten in human form.”

“Agreed.”

Rokuko deftly avoided rejecting it outright. She and Aidy proceeded to experiment with all new forms of melon rolls, and as they did so one corner of the assembly seemed to be getting louder. And then...

“Rokukooo! Aidyyy! I’m here, toooo!” came a cry.

“G-Gah, Mikan! Don’t shout! Aaah, look, everyone’s eyes are on me now!”

At the center of the fuss was Mikan, a Rabbit-type Dungeon Core (Number 629), and Core 564, a Baphomet-type Core. Mikan was riding Core 564’s head. In other words, a cute orange rabbit was casually resting between two massive goat horns. It was very surreal.

“Why’s a 600 Core on top of Core 564’s head... Oh, wait, he lost? Core 564 lost to him?”

“Bwahaha, he’s an embarrassment to the 500 Cores. He even got booted out of the Demon King faction.”

“That Rabbit Core’s not bad. Core 629... Mikan, was it?”

Rokuko recalled that the other Cores hadn’t seen them since Core 564 challenged Mikan. Apparently quite a few Cores had been waiting to see how that turned out. The fact that Mikan and Aidy’s names were publicized and approved by Father, though, so the victor was more than obvious.

“There is no greater humiliation than having a lower-ranked Core kicking its

feet atop my true form in front of the masses! Get down, Mikan!”

“Ehhh, don’t wanna. This is comfy,” Mikan said, continuing his lounging. Core 564 was being treated entirely like a vehicle, to the point of having his horns smacked to change direction. And so they met up with Rokuko and Aidy.

“Ngh, how could this happen to me...?” Core 564 groaned.

“Oh my, is it not obvious? This is all because you lost a duel you initiated,” Aidy said, merciless.

“I-I would not have lost had it not been three against one! O-Or really, if it had only not been for Core 695’s Master...!”

“It certainly is true that her Master is quite special. He even defeated me,” Aidy mused.

“Oh, you lost to a mere human? How shameful! Bwahaha!”

“Oh my, but you would have no hope of winning, either, Core 564. We speak of the man who landed three blows on Core 50, remember.”

“B-But, one of those blows was me...”

“Accomplished only through the tactics of Rokuko’s Master,” Aidy scoffed.

“Mm-hmm! My dungeon’s going great thanks to Keima!” Mikan exclaimed. Meanwhile, Rokuko held her head high with pride as all three of them praised Keima highly.

Incidentally, not much had changed in the DP rankings from last year. At most, one could say that Mikan’s ranking had shot up thanks to beating Core 564, while Core 564’s ranking plummeted in term. Rokuko and Aidy’s rankings went up a bit, but not by too much. There was the giant Snake, Frog, and Slug glaring at Rokuko’s happy group, but they had been looked after by the Dragon King faction ever since the triple threat Dungeon Battle, and they were so busy running around with barrels of alcohol they didn’t have the time to interfere. Not that they had any right to interfere when they had lost so soundly.

...Also, some Cores that had absolutely nothing to do with Rokuko’s gang never showed up, having probably died, but that was normal for Dungeon Cores, so nobody paid their absence any mind.









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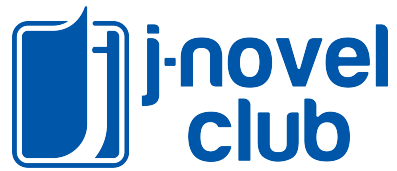
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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 15

by Supana Onikage

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